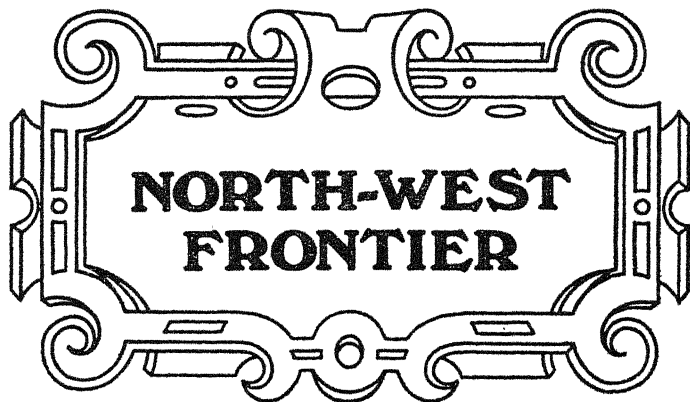


ARTHUR SWINSON



People and Events

1839-1947

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CONTENTS

<i>Author's Foreword</i>	13
1 Introductory: The Place and the People	17
2 Lord Auckland has a Plan	30
3 Retreat from Glory	61
4 One Flag: One Frontier	99
5 The Years of Masterly Inactivity	116
6 The Poet in Simla	164
7 England Finds a Hero	198
8 The Clash at Panjdeh	231
9 Adventure in Chitral	242
10 The Pathan Revolt	271
11 The End of the Game	298
12 Invasion from the North	313
13 The Mollie Ellis Affair	334
14 The Rise of the Red Shirts	357
15 The Turbulent Thirties	376
Epilogue	392
<i>Bibliography</i>	405
<i>Index</i>	409

ILLUSTRATIONS

BETWEEN PAGES 96 AND 97

Lt. General Sir S. Browne's column before the fort of Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass, 1878. (Radio Times Hulton Picture Library.)

Mule-train on the Khyber Pass.

Major Sir Louis Cavagnari with the Amir Ayub Khan. A photograph taken in August 1879 a few weeks before Cavagnari's death. Also in the group are Mr. Jenkyns, a member of the British Mission, General Daoud Shah, the Afghan Commander-in-Chief, and Mustaphi Habiullah Khan.

General Stewart and his staff, 1879.

General Roberts and staff, 1880.

Saving the guns at Maiwand, 1880. A contemporary painting.

Yukub Khan rides into General Sam Browne's camp near Gandamak, 9th May 1880.

The gateway to the Bala Hissar, Kabul.

Kandahar, site of Roberts' victory over Ayub Khan on 1st September 1880. In the distance is the Kotal, the centre of the Afghan position.

The Sherpur Cantonment, outside Kabul, January 1880. The troops are standing-to at the north-western corner.

Night attack on the Frontier. A war artist's impression of an incident during the Pathan revolt of 1897. The gunners are using star shells for the first time.

The Russians attack the Afghans on the Khushk river near Panjdeh, 30th March 1885. A war artist's drawing.

Cavalry on the march near Landi Khana during the Third Afghan War, 1919.

Big gate of Fort Jamrud; Gordon Highlanders on guard, 1897.

Heliographing from Hari Singh to Fort Jamrud, 1897.

A column of Lancers on the march in the 1890's.

Mohmand and Tirah Expedition; dictating terms to Orakzais: 12th November 1897.

The attack on Peiwar Kotal, from the painting by V. M. Hamilton.

Arrival at Shinawari Fort: 24th April 1923. Mollie is wearing the white topee.

Courtyard of the Mullah's house.

The Amir Sher Ali: a portrait taken in 1880.

Light Infantry on the march four miles from Jamrud during the Third Afghan War, 1919.

Westland Wapitis patrolling the Kohat Pass, 1939.

LIST OF MAPS

1	The North-West Frontier	<i>opposite page</i> 17
2	Kabul City and outlying areas	197
3	Afghanistan	229
4	Peshawar City	358

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

THE North-West Frontier of India must surely be one of the most legendary of places on the Earth's surface. No area of comparable size has seen so much action, bloodshed, intrigue, gallantry, savagery, devotion, patience, or sacrifice. Here, both virtues and vices have been bred on an heroic scale; and the centuries have passed without eroding them. Both Alexander the Great and Field Marshal Alexander of Tunis served here; and between them a great scroll of names—Tamerlane, Babur, Akbar, and, with the coming of the British, Pollock, Napier, Lumsden, Nicholson, Roberts, Robertson, Blood, Churchill, Wavell, Slim, Auchinleck, and even Lawrence of Arabia. Apart from soldiers, the Frontier has involved generations of administrators, politicians, and statesmen: Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Dalhousie, Lawrence, Lytton, Curzon, Gandhi, Nehru, Attlee, Jinnah, and Mountbatten. Governments have come to power or fallen, through their Frontier policies. The Frontier has not only been the concern of Britain, India, and Afghanistan (and in recent years Pakistan); the mysterious pressures it generates have involved Russia, China, Persia, Turkey, and even France; on two occasions these pressures have brought the world to the brink of war. And (it may be relevant to add) they still seem to have lost little of their potency.

My principal object in this work has been to tell the story of the North-West Frontier, concentrating chiefly on the century during which it was held by the British. I must frankly disclaim any pretensions to having attempted a definitive history: if that work is ever accomplished it will be through the labour of many scholars over many years. The material to draw on is vast, the documents in London alone running into many tons. Dr. C. Collin Davies in his distinguished work *The Problems of the North-West Frontier 1890-1908*, completed in 1931, com-

plained that the papers available even then took him several years to read. And since that date they have grown enormously. The catalogue of published works is endless, too, and is being rapidly expanded as new and explosive chapters on the Frontier's history are being made in Kashmir. My purpose for mentioning this immensity of material is to illustrate the impossibility of covering every aspect of the Frontier comprehensively in one volume; those familiar with the Frontier may find that some important matters have only been touched on in passing, and others have been ignored. I can only hope in these circumstances that my selection will not seem capricious, and explain that it has been based on the demands of narrative and the interest of the general reader.

Any writer dealing with the history of India and Afghanistan has to face the problem of spelling proper names, and especially the names of cities. Here again I have given priority to the demands of the general reader, preferring 'Kandahar' to 'Qandahar' though the latter is probably more accurate. An even more difficult problem arises in quotations from books and papers, and even here I have rashly followed the same principle. The strict canons of scholarship have doubtless been outraged: but the alternative is to accept variations such as 'Kabul, Cabul, Cabool, Cabaul, and Qabul' in the space of a few pages. This policy, like any other, inevitably gives rise to some anomalies, but in the general interest of clarity I feel that these must be accepted, and pray for the reader's indulgence.

For the sake of clarity I should also mention the policy adopted when describing military formations engaged in the various campaigns. Before the Mutiny there were the East India Company's forces and units of the British Army serving with them. After the Mutiny there came the Indian Army, and units of the British Army which served in Indian brigades and divisions. In a technical work it would naturally be essential to specify formations precisely and indeed include detailed orders of battle. As such detail would become wearisome to the general reader,

however, I have resorted to employing the term 'British forces' on many occasions, which, though no doubt offending purists, does clearly differentiate these forces from Afghan, tribal, or Russian forces. I have, of course, indicated in each instance whether individual units were British, Indian, or Gurkha.

ONE

INTRODUCTORY: THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

THE ancient peoples of India called it 'Sindhu', the Greeks 'Sinthos', and the Romans 'Sindus'. Today it is known as the Indus, or, in its lower reaches, as Darya—the Big River. It rises in Tibet, 17,000 feet up among the glaciers to the north of Kailas Parbat, and for 700 miles strikes north-west through a jagged trough between the mountain ranges, its icy waters descending rapidly and at times precipitously in a fury of froth and spume. Twice it crosses the Ladakh Range before plunging past the Haramosh Peak through a magnificent 10,000-foot gorge. Then suddenly it veers south-west and, joined by the Gilgit river, drops to 4,000 feet before rounding the flanks of Nanga Parbat, the legendary mountain whose snow-capped peak soars to 26,600 feet. Still losing height, it leaves the Great Himalayas to strike south through Kohistan towards the plain of Terbela, which it reaches near Ghazi. Near Attock, thirty miles to the west, it makes a swift lunge through a narrow gorge in a final salute to the mountains, and having been joined by the Kabul river, traverses the edge of the Potwar plateau. Still forging south-west, it penetrates the Salt Range to emerge at last on the Punjab plain. The great adventures are over; but growing and prospering, and receiving the Panjnad or 'five waters' of the Punjab, it flows across the blistering wastes of Sind to reach the Arabian Sea near Karachi.

The Indus is a great river, 1,800 miles long, and drawing its waters from a Himalayan basin of over 100,000

square miles. It is the boundary between India and Central Asia. For a thousand years the influence of Hinduism has stopped at its banks; geographically, culturally, and ethnographically India is the country 'south-east of the Indus and south of the Himalayas'. This range of mountains, the greatest massif on earth, is a formidable if not impregnable barrier; but the Indus is not. From the dawn of history invaders have swept across it, and no fortresses, no defensive systems, have succeeded in checking them. For long stretches the left bank of the river is commanded by the right; also the channel is constantly changing its course, and when the snows have begun melting in the Himalayas the land for miles on either side is flooded. Bridges and roads are swept away, and even as recently as 1923 the waters threatened to destroy the whole town of Dera Ismail Khan. Altogether, as a physical barrier or as the basis for a military defence line, the Indus is inadequate and capricious; this is a fact which successive rulers of northern India have had to recognise. It is a fact, too, which for many centuries has had a major impact on world history.

The true barrier between Central and Southern Asia lies some 200 miles to the north-west of the Indus. This is the Hindu Kush, a range of mountains running from the great barren uplands of the Pamirs towards the borders of Persia. The name by tradition means 'Hindu killer' and derives from the fact that in previous centuries thousands of slaves brought from India died in its snow-blocked passes. The Hindu Kush was known to the Greeks, who called it 'Paropamisus', and the name still remains, though today applied only to the lower ranges separating Herat from the Russian frontier. Writers at the time of Alexander the Great called the Hindu Kush 'the Indian Caucasus' and the name stuck for centuries, long after the range itself had retreated into legend. Marco Polo saw it far away to his right on his journey to the court of Kubla Khan; Genghis Khan crossed and recrossed its passes, but the records left by both men are scanty. Well into the nineteenth century the Hindu Kush

was unmapped, unvisited, and almost unknown outside the small world of scientists and explorers; and its geographic and political importance was recognised only slowly.

It is a great range, 600 miles long, with its main ridges reaching 15,000 and even 20,000 feet, and the subsidiary ridges running off both to north and south. Its deep ravines in the eastern sectors are covered with magnificent forests of deodar, pine, and larch, while further west the slopes are bare and sparsely covered with coarse grass which gives seasonal grazing to the wandering sheep which in summer move up from the parched plains. According to Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler, who studied the Hindu Kush for over half a lifetime, 'the great range is of a desolate, little-known country, a country of great peaks and deep valleys, of precipitous gorges and rushing grey-green rivers; a barren beautiful country of intense sunlight, clear sparkling air and wonderful colouring as the shadows lengthen and the peaks and rocks above turn gold and pink and mauve in the light of the setting sun'. Colonel Algernon Durand, who saw it for the first time in 1888, standing on a spur of Nanga Parbat, has recorded: 'The Hindu Kush once seen in its most majestic aspects crushes all comparison.' Even the main passes are higher than many considerable mountains, the Khawak at 11,640 feet, the Ak Robat at 12,560 feet, and the Qipchak at 13,900 feet. The first two are open for six months of the year and the third from May to October in a normal season. There are other passes, but they lead through such inhospitable country as to be virtually impassable for large bodies of men or animals. Of the great invaders, Alexander used the Khawak Pass, to be followed a thousand years later by Timur-i-Lang, better known as Tamerlane, who swept down from his court at Samarkand. Two hundred years later, Mohammed Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane, and, on his mother's side, of Genghis Khan, came across the Qipchak Pass to found the Mogul Empire. All down the centuries the passes lay undefended, but still the Hindu Kush proved a formid-

able barrier; successive Indian Empires withered away as their rulers failed to sustain themselves and their armies. Each winter as the snows returned to block the passes, the invaders found themselves cut off from their capitals; the power exerted by the mountain ranges was slow and silent, but utterly relentless.

Between the Hindu Kush and the river Indus lies another chain of mountains, the Safed Koh and the Sulaiman Range, which end at Sibi, at the southern entrance to the Bolan Pass. The latter range runs north-east towards the eastern limits of the Hindu Kush, and so with it forms the rough shape of a letter 'V' turned on its side. Parallel to the Sulaiman Range runs the Indus. The passes through this latter range of mountains are not so high as the Khawak or the Qipchak, but they are still formidable, and much more famous: the Khyber, the Kurram, and the Bolan are names which recur again and again in the history of the Frontier. It has been said, and without too much exaggeration, that every stone in the Khyber has been soaked with the blood of battle; the name has become synonymous with treachery, feuds, and barbaric guerilla warfare. As it will be seen, the Khyber with the other north-west passes lie between the Indus (the cultural boundary) and the Hindu Kush (the physical barrier). Therefore, anyone forming a defensive line on the Hindu Kush has the Khyber behind him; anyone falling back to the Indus plain is dominated by the Sulaiman Range. This is the dilemma which has baffled generations of statesmen and soldiers; policy after policy has been tried and discarded, as the great drama of the North-West Frontier has unrolled. No policy has succeeded completely, and some have led to disaster.

But one must not give the impression that any problem on the Frontier is clear-cut; here geography jostles with ethnology, strategy with history. Although India stops at the Indus, the plain continues for another fifty miles, and inevitably the rulers of the Punjab have extended their domain to the very edge of it, taking in the Peshawar valley. The plain has therefore come to mark the edge of

the administered area. But between this boundary and the frontier of Afghanistan (the land of the Hindu Kush) lies a strip of what is called 'tribal territory'. Starting from the Little Pamir in the north, this runs through Chitral, Kohistan, Bajaur, Khyber, Tirah, Waziristan ('the Frontier Switzerland'), and Baluchistan. This tribal or North-West Frontier territory, comprising some 40,000 square miles, once belonged to Afghanistan, and is still largely inhabited by Pathans, the principal race of that country—some 3,000,000 of them. The political frontier therefore does not constitute an ethnic boundary; though the Pathans inside Afghanistan are usually called Afghans, they are the same race as those living on the Frontier, and recognise themselves as such. If nature had made them a docile, peace-loving people this fact might not have complicated the situation on the Frontier: but, as it is, the Pathans are possibly the most ferocious, independent, and warlike race ever known. They may be hated or loved but never can they be ignored. The Pathans, in fact, form an ethnic factor, which, allied to the geographical and political factors already outlined, have through the centuries made the North-West Frontier of India one of the most sensitive and explosive areas on the earth's surface.

Their own name for themselves is 'Pukhtun-wala', or the men who speak Pashtu, their native tongue. They are divided into some dozens of tribes, varying in strength from thousands to hundreds of thousands, and the tribes in turn are divided into khels, which are roughly comparable with clans. The Pathans claim descent from the Jews and look on King Saul as their great ancestor, but modern science is somewhat sceptical, pointing out that there is only a facial likeness and that prevalence of Biblical names which in any way can be considered as evidence. So far as anyone can tell, the Pathan is of the Turko-Iranian type, and usually has some Indian and other blood in him. The Red Kafirs and northern Pathans, for example, have undoubtedly intermingled with the Dinaric race which was thrown out of Russian

Turkestan during the Mongol invasions. They are undoubtedly an ancient race. The Greek historian Herodotus speaks of 'the most warlike of all the Indians, who live around the city of Kaspatureos in the country of Paktuike', and Sir Olaf Caroe has identified Kaspatureos as Peshawar, the unchallenged queen of the Pathan cities, some twelve miles from the mouth of the Khyber. By the tenth century the Pathans were already converted to Islam, and by the fifteenth were powerful enough to invade Delhi under Bahlol Lodi and establish a dynasty which lasted seventy-five years.

In appearance the tribes vary considerably. Some men are light of skin, eye, and hair; many have a long head, aquiline nose, rosey-white complexion, and nut-brown eyes and hair. Other tribes are short in stature, with medium noses, broad faces, and brown complexions. But, whatever their strain, the Pathans always have a remote, proud, independent air about them. They are no one's lackey. For many people they hold a strange fascination; an American State Department official like James Spain, having read of them in Kipling, could throw up his career to go in quest of them. Sir Olaf Caroe, the British administrator, could write after many years on the Frontier, 'for the stranger who had eyes to see and ears to hear, always as he drove through the Margalla Pass just north of Rawalpindi and went on to cross the great bridge at Attock, there was a lifting of the heart and a knowledge that, however hard the task and beset with danger, here was a people who looked him in the face and made him feel he had come home'.

Not everyone feels this fascination; and for many the excitement of crossing from India to Central Asia has always been mixed with apprehension and fear. This feeling has been beautifully caught by John Masters, as he describes the passage of his heroine, Anne Hildreth, at the outbreak of the Second Afghan War in 1879:

'Across the scrub-covered plain approached men with camels. The men had the faces of eagles and walked with a long, slow lifting stride. One of them looked up as he

passed by. Anne smiled at him, expecting the salaam and the answering smile of an ordinary Indian wayfarer. But this was not India. The man stared her down, from pale green Kohl-rimmed eyes. He carried a long rifle slung across his shoulders; a woman, shapelessly swathed in red and black cotton, swayed on top of the camel that he led; a lad of fourteen walked behind the camel; the lad had no beard, but his stride was an exact imitation of his father's lilt, and he too carried a rifle.'

And he too carried a rifle.... Whether fascinated by them or not, one must never forget that one of the basic facts about the Pathans is their taste for violence. Thinking of themselves as Afridis, Wazirs, Mahsuds, or Mohmands, their absolute allegiance goes to the clan, and they live according to their own law, Pukhtunwali, 'the way of the Pathan'. The first commandment of this law is badal, revenge. A Pathan is bound to take revenge for any wrong, whether actual or fancied, and whether he has suffered it personally, or his family or khel. Most of their grievances stem from 'zar, zan, or zamin'—gold, woman, or land. Vendettas may have their origins in trivial, even negative, actions, such as a failure to show proper respect, but once begun they grow in size and violence; because a man has been slighted in a remote village by the Helmand river another may be murdered in Bombay or London or Paris many years later. Some vendettas are ended only after one of the families concerned has been wiped out, or has submitted to the ultimate humiliation of nanawatai and throws itself at the feet of its enemy to ask for mercy. The second law of the Pathans is melmastia, or hospitality, and this is so strong that it takes precedence over badal on certain occasions; even an enemy who seeks refuge must be granted it, and if necessary protected against his pursuers. The clan leader is called a 'malik', the Arabic title for king; but the malik has no regal powers and only maintains his position through constant exertions. He is little more than the first among equals. The Pathans, in fact, are intensely democratic, and the jirga or council is one of

their oldest institutions. Its decisions are ruthlessly enforced. Within the family, however, the husband is a law unto himself. He can, if he wishes, put his wife to death for infidelity, and can deal with a daughter who has disgraced the family just as severely. Pathan women, in fact, outside the small circle of noble families, are little more than chattels. Though the Pathans are the principal people of Afghanistan and the Frontier area, there are other considerable groups, notably the Ghilzais, who claim to be descended from Noah. The probability is, however, that they are of Turkish origin, and come from the Khalaj tribes, which originated to the north of the Tien Shan mountains. Like the Pathans, the Ghilzais are subdivided into clans—the Tokhi and Hotak, the Andar, and Taraki. For centuries the Ghilzais have come down into the Derajat in the northern Punjab for periods of the year with the whole of their families and their animals, and some have stayed. Other tribes of Turkish origin are the Turkmen, who live along the southern bank of the Oxus, and smaller groups like the Kazaks and Chagatai Turks of northern Afghanistan. To complicate the ethnological picture even further there are Mongol tribes such as the Hazaras, descendants of the Mongol Tartar regiments of Genghis Khan. These inhabit the narrow valleys and rugged passes of central Afghanistan, and are a courageous, good-natured people. In the summer they tend their sheep, and in winter, when their lands are entirely covered with snow, they occupy themselves in spinning and weaving and working in cloth and leather. The Tajiks, a tribe settled chiefly around Kabul and in Kohistan, are of Persian origin, a shrewd, avaricious, but hard-working race. Apart from the races and tribes listed here, there are dozens of other tribes and sub-tribes to be introduced as the narrative demands. But even this cursory glance at the peoples of Afghanistan and the Frontier region should serve to show that it is an ethnological jigsaw of frightening complexity, the relic of a dozen or more lost empires. Along the Frontier alone there are Kafirs, Chitralis, Mohmands, Shinwaris, Afridis

(who guard the Khyber), Orakzais, Darwesh Khels, Ban-nuchis, Waziris, Dawaris, Marwats, Mahsuds, Bhittanis, Baluchis and in Kalat State and Mekhran, the Brahuis—and even this list is by no means comprehensive.

The Afghans were recognised as a separate people long before the birth of their country. The Moorish traveller, Ibn Batuta, who passed through Kabul in 1333, reported it inhabited 'by a tribe of Persians called Afghans.... They hold mountains and defiles, possess considerable strength and are mostly highwaymen.' The derivation of 'Afghan', incidentally, is unknown, though it was first used in a work called *Hudad-al-Alam* by an anonymous Arab geographer, written about A.D. 982. While other peoples developed, the Afghans remained as shepherds and highwaymen, and their attempts at establishing their own country were spasmodic and ephemeral. When Mohammed Babur, the Barlas Turk, reigned in Kabul in the sixteenth century, he considered Afghanistan to consist solely of the country lying south of the Kabul-Peshawar road. Possession of Herat and Kandahar was consistently changing as power in Persia and northern India ebbed and flowed.* When Akbar established the Mogul Empire in Delhi in 1556, after the battle of Panipat, the country of the Hindu Kush became merely an outpost, and such it remained for nearly 200 years. The Uzbegs fought the Moguls for Badakhshan, the high barren plateau near the Oxus loop, and the Persians for Herat; the Persians and Moguls fought for Kandahar; and altogether the situation was confused and unstable. With the weakening of the Moguls, about 1650, the pattern changed considerably, with the Persians reoccupying Kandahar and threatening Ghazni, while the Afridis of the Khyber revolted against the Moguls. The early eighteenth century saw the rise of the Persian, Nadir Quli Beg, afterwards known as Nadir Shah, who came from the Afshars, a Turkish tribe. From an early age he showed marked qualities of leadership and military genius; he defeated the Ghilzais and the Abdali (or Abdulahi) clan, and by 1738 had captured both Herat

and Kandahar. In September of that year, emulating the great Persian Emperors of the past, he crossed the Indus to attack the Mogul emperor, Mohammed Shah, and beat him in a pitched battle near Delhi. Here he remained for two months, while peace terms were negotiated, then restored the Mogul emperor to his throne, before marching north again. His price was the annexation of all the Mogul territories north and west of the Indus, so again this great river became the political frontier. Nadir Shah reached Kandahar in 1740, and soon was on another campaign, to acquire territories north of the Hindu Kush as far as Samarkand, Bokhara, and Khiva. His empire now extended as far east as that of the ancient emperor Darius, before his defeat by Alexander the Great. But unfortunately old age did not mellow Nadir Shah; on the contrary his reign became steadily more barbaric, his people being driven to desperation. In 1747, when he was on his way to deal with a revolt by the Kurds, some members of his court murdered him. The commander of his Afghan bodyguard, a man called Ahmad Shah Abdali, managed to escape from the Persian camp with some companions and reached Kandahar. Here Ahmad Shah was elected the first king of the Afghans, and assumed the name of 'Dur-i-Durran', the Pearl of Pearls, his tribe, the Abdalis, coming to be known as the Dur-rani. Ahmad Shah controlled all the country of the Hindu Kush lying between the Oxus and Indus rivers. The northern and western boundaries lay very much on the same lines as they do today, but to the south his kingdom included the North-West Frontier region, and the province of Baluchistan at its southern extremity. Within a few years, however, the Afghans had occupied large territories of the Junjab in northern India and in 1756 looted Delhi. Unable to leave his own capital for too long (like all the Afghan rulers who succeeded him), Ahmad Shah deputed his son, Timur Shah, to rule over his provinces east of the Indus, and by 1758 the boy was engaged in a desperate struggle with the armies of the Mahratta Confederacy. In that year they succeeded in

driving him back across the Indus, and Ahmad Shah himself had to come back into the field and conduct a bloody campaign to decide who should rule northern India. On the 14th January 1761, on the field of Panipat, some thirty miles from Delhi, the Afghans and the Mahrattas met in one of the decisive battles of history. Both sides mustered armies of almost 100,000 men and the slaughter went on from morning to late afternoon, when the Mahrattas, with their leaders killed and their picked battalions decimated, fled the field. Never again did they attempt to rule northern India; and the victorious Ahmad Shah went on to defeat the Sikh army near Lahore, and annexed Tibet. For a few years he ruled an empire stretching from the Atrek river to Delhi and from the borders of Tibet to the Indian Ocean. The North-West Frontier had been temporarily obliterated.

The situation, however, was very unstable. Before the end of 1761 Ahmad Shah was glad to restore Delhi to a Mogul prince, and in 1767 he gave up the central Punjab to the Sikhs, retaining Lahore, Kashmir, and Multan.

With Ahmad Shah's death, Timur had to dispute the throne with his brother Sulaiman Mirza, who had been proclaimed king in Kandahar, the city dominating the south-western regions of Afghanistan. Sulaiman was quickly defeated, but Timur, disgusted with the conduct of the people of Kandahar, moved his court to Kabul, which then became the capital of Afghanistan, and has remained so until today. In 1793 Timur died, it is thought from poisoning, and the Durrani Empire decayed. By some curious mischance he had failed to nominate an heir, and as twenty-three sons survived him, the bickering and fighting went on for some years. Zaman Shah, the fifth son, who forced his way on to the throne with the backing of the powerful Muhammadzai tribe, was defeated and blinded in 1800 by his brother Mahmud, and took refuge in India. Mahmud, indolent and incompetent, was deposed three years later by Shah Shuja. In 1809 he in turn gave way to Mahmud, whose second attempt to rule Afghanistan ended in disaster, not

only for himself but the whole Sadozai family. In 1818 he seized Fateh Khan, his chief adviser and leader of the Muhammadzais, and had his eyes put out. This sudden act of barbarity aroused the whole Muhammadzai tribe, who drove the Sadozais from Kabul, leaving them to take refuge in Herat, a town on the western fringe of the country, near the borders of Persia. The forces which had created the North-West Frontier operated again to restore it. Once more, in the central sector at least, the Indus became the boundary line.

The internecine warfare continued in Afghanistan for another eight years, one princeling after another trying his luck on the throne, until in 1826 Dost Mohammed, youngest son of a murdered Muhammadzai chieftain, took control. Dost Mohammed—one of the main actors in the drama to come—was tall, finely built, and had a regal air about him. His eyes were keen and his conversation was vigorous. He was astute, determined, though not without a grim sense of humour. He once remarked to a British officer that, as a Mohammedan ruler, he would sweep the British unbelievers into the sea if he got the chance, then added charmingly that as he temporarily needed their help, he would have to treat with them.

By now the Sikhs had acquired a powerful and cunning ruler named Ranjit Singh, whose armies had seized Kashmir, Multan, the Derajat (in the northern Punjab), and in 1820 had crossed the Indus to wrest control of the Peshawar valley. This action was to prove one of the most important events in the whole history of the Frontier and to shape events which have followed right up till today. To Dost Mohammed, gazing round his shattered kingdom from the court in Kabul, the situation must have seemed dark indeed. But before he could even raise an army to march against the Sikhs he became aware that new and greater forces were coming into play. The Russians had just begun surveying the Caspian and Aral seas in Central Asia and were preparing to send a new expedition against Khiva, 450 miles beyond his northern frontier. To the south, the British were steadily extend-

ing their hold on India and had already defeated the Mahrattas. Ostensibly they had no intention of approaching the Frontier and had signed a treaty with Ranjit Singh whom they regarded as a firm ally. However, there could be no doubt that they had become very much aware of the Frontier's existence; the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, was already urging the British envoy in Persia to dissuade the Shah from attacking Herat. 'We must view with umbrage and displeasure,' he wrote, 'the scene of interference and conquest on our north-western frontier.'

The scene was now set for one of the most fateful and bloody phases in the history of the Frontier.

TWO

LORD AUCKLAND HAS A PLAN

ON the 27th November 1838 Lord Auckland arrived at Ferozepore, a Punjab town near Lahore, accompanied by his sister, the Honourable Emily Eden, his advisers and staff, and a vast retinue of servants. His object was to review his army before it marched into Afghanistan, and to meet Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Punjab. For miles across the plain there stretched the tents of the infantry, the cavalry, and the artillery, set out immaculately in rows. Through the centre of the camp there ran a wide avenue which was now lined by the guard of honour, resplendent in its full-dress uniforms. At an agreed signal there was a roar of guns, then the military bands struck up, and a line of elephants moved slowly down the avenue, carrying Ranjit Singh and his staff, in a blaze of oriental magnificence. From the further end of the avenue, Lord Auckland and his party, also mounted on elephants, advanced to meet it, cheered on by the thousands of troops, who came thronging from their tents. Perhaps carried away by the excitement, the mahouts spurred on their great beasts, and the two processions closed steadily, then collided. For some minutes there was chaos and some danger, at the elephants wheeled and crashed into each other, and the howdahs swayed precariously, threatening to eject their distinguished occupants into the roaring crowds below. However, the mahouts somehow managed to regain control, and Auckland found himself facing Ranjit Singh, their two elephants now standing side by side. Then, as the howdahs were manoeuvred to within inches of each other, Ranjit Singh

stood up, and was handed across the gap. Quickly hands stretched out to pull him into his seat, then the elephants swung round again, and both processions, hemmed in by a great crowd of troops and onlookers, headed for the durbar tent. Here the press was even greater; some members of the Sikh bodyguard began wondering if their aged chief would be crushed to death, and brought up their guns in readiness to fire. But somehow relative order was restored again, and then, flanked by Auckland on one side and Sir Henry Fane, the British Commander-in-Chief, on the other, Ranjit Singh slowly made his way into the tent.

He was dressed, Emily Eden records, in a red silk dress, and wore stockings, but after resting upon the settee for a while 'soon contrived to slip one off, that he might sit with one foot in his hand, comfortably'. By him, caressing his leg, sat his favourite boy, Heera Singh, magnificently dressed and 'loaded with emeralds and pearls'. After the formal greetings had been completed some of Auckland's aides came forward with a picture of Queen Victoria by Miss Eden herself, resting on a green and gold cushion. All the company stood up, and as the artillery outside fired a salute of twenty-one guns the gift was handed over. For five minutes or more Ranjit Singh examined the picture with his one remaining eye, asked if the details were accurate, then remarked that it was the most gratifying present he could have received. 'On my return to camp,' he added, 'the picture will be hung outside my tent and I shall have a royal salute fired.' In this cordial atmosphere two howitzers and 200 shells were presented, followed by 'an elephant with gold trappings and seven horses equally bedizened'. But then things went wrong: in the excitement one of the shells which had been knocked over rolled into Ranjit Singh's path, and, before anyone could prevent him, he had tripped over it and fallen flat on his face. He was hauled to his feet and proved unhurt; but the incident was looked on as a bad omen by the Sikhs present. The symbolism of their ruler lying prostrate before the British guns was too plain for

comfort.

The following day, when Auckland returned the visit and rode into the Sikh camp, the pageantry was even more magnificent: and foremost among the troops were the royal bodyguard dressed in yellow satin, with gold scarves and shawls. Even their beards were enveloped 'in a drapery of gold or silver tissue to protect them from the dust', and their arms (declares a Sikh historian) 'were all of gold'. As the festivities progressed, Ranjit Singh became so amenable that to the annoyance of his prime minister and staff he was heard to declare, 'The Sikhs and the English are to be all one family, and live in the same house.' Any suspicion and jealousy, Emily Eden noted in her diary, had been completely overcome; Ranjit Singh was now determined to demonstrate how completely he trusted the English.

Not all the English were quite so sanguine; and some viewed the Sikh court with distaste. The dancing girls were considered far too naked and 'the antics of some-male buffons' completely disgusting. Emily Eden in her girlish naivety had failed to appreciate the paederastic nature of Ranjit's relations with the gorgeously bedizened boys around him, but those who did were somewhat revolted. The sight to Victorian eyes must certainly have been extraordinary, with the boys seated on gold and silver chairs, and Heera Singh 'one mass of jewels ... his neck, arms, and legs were covered so thickly with necklaces, armlcts, and bangles, formed of pearls, diamonds, and rubies, one above the other, that it was difficult to discover anything between them'. In the words of Sir John Kaye, 'it was a melancholy thing to see the open exhibition ... of all those low vices which were destroying life, and damning the reputation of one who, but for these degrading sensualities ... was one of the most remarkable men of modern times'.

Though assessing Ranjit's tastes and sexual habits from a strictly Victorian standpoint, Kaye was undoubtedly right in his main judgment. This was undoubtedly the most remarkable ruler produced by India

in the nineteenth century. Almost from nothing he had built up a great Sikh empire and now dominated the whole Punjab and the Peshawar valley. His first great office was the governorship of Peshawar, to which he was raised, ironically enough, by the Afghans, on the understanding that he would recognise their overlordship. However, as he soon observed, the Sadozai regime in Kabul was fast waning, so he took the power into his own hands. Travelling in disguise, he visited the British camps and noted how the native troops were trained. Then, carefully insuring himself by a treaty of 'perpetual friendship' with the East India Company, he engaged French, Italian, and Dutch officers to train his own forces and build up the Khalsa, the army of the 'elect' or 'chosen' people, as the Sikhs called themselves. Rapidly his territories expanded. But he was too subtle to use force as anything but a last resort; negotiation led to bargaining, bargaining to coercion, and coercion to bullying, and only when this failed did the Khalsa receive orders to march. By the time Ranjit was forty, the Sikh nation, which barely numbered half a million, were lords of all they surveyed.

But having secured his empire he made no attempt to organise or improve it. According to Bosworth Smith, 'a good army and a full exchequer were . . . the only objects of his government'. Taxes were levied on necessities and luxuries alike, and powerful governors in each province were appointed to ensure their collection. But, curiously enough, no accounts or balance sheets were demanded, and for sixteen years the Army Paymaster neglected to submit any statement whatsoever. Ranjit himself could neither read nor write, and the only aide-memoire he ever used in his life was a notched stick. His criminal code was simple but severe, and its mode of execution varied according to the local governor. Thefts or ordinary murders were punishable by fines; crimes of gross violence by mutilation—the loss of ears, nose, or hand; and the worst criminals were hamstrung. General Avitabile, an Italian who served him as the governor of

Peshawar, found this code to lenient, however, and substituted his own; anyone opposing his will was blown from the guns, or turned out to die in the sun, naked and smeared with honey, or sawn in half between two planks, or impaled, or flayed alive. Ranjit's police force was used chiefly to put down disorder and facilitate the movements of the army. There were no judges, no schools, no hospitals, no proper roads. There was no written law whatsoever. Still the regime was stable, and though Ranjit Singh was old, tottered on his feet, and drank regularly to excess, no one dared oppose him. As Emily Eden put it, '... he has made himself a great King; he has conquered a great many powerful enemies ... he has disciplined a large army; he hardly ever takes away a life which is wonderful in a despot; and he is excessively beloved by his people ...'. Modern historians regard these observations as rather shrewd: by the oriental standards of the day, Ranjit's regime was relatively liberal.

It should not be imagined that the debauchery he laid on for the entertainment of Auckland and his party was anything unusual; for years he had been drinking to excess and indulging in whatever his own or other imaginations could devise by way of debauchery. Beautiful Kashmiri girls littered his court, though disease and age steadily lessened his enjoyment of them; but when he turned to boys for consolation he still retained the girls, mounting them on horse-back and making them gallop. When Emily Eden met him she thought he looked like 'an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye'. and she might also have added that he was frail, white-bearded, and bent. But his mind still functioned and, drunk or sober, his power from Peshawar to Lahore was absolute.

Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, as might be expected, presented a violent contrast in every way. At this time fifty-four years of age, he was a plain undemonstrative Englishman from Beckenham in Kent. Most people found him gentle, pleasant to deal with, and kind-hearted, and his servants thought the world of him. His courtesy never varied, whatever the station, race, or creed

of the person he was dealing with; he treated the Indians just the same as the English. If he happened to stumble upon some instance of personal distress which it was in his power to alleviate he would take action at once. He was born George Eden, his father being the first Lord Auckland and his mother sister to the Earl of Minto, and initially settled on a legal career. In 1809 he entered Lincoln's Inn to read for the Bar, but the following year managed to get a safe seat in the House of Commons, where he sat as a Whig. Playing himself in quietly during the years after Waterloo when his party was in opposition, he spoke upon every conceivable topic; there was nothing too dull or insignificant for his modest talent. Such pertinacity often pays dividends, and (so Auckland's biographer notes) 'His regular attendance and plain commonsense commended him to the Whig leaders'. In 1830 Lord Grey made him President of the Board of Trade, and four years later he became the First Lord of the Admiralty—apart from W. H. Smith, the bookseller, the most un-naval First Lord there ever was. However, Britain was at peace and few opportunities to blunder presented themselves, so the following year, when Melbourne decided to revoke Sir Robert Peel's nomination of Lord Heytesbury as Governor-General of India, he substituted Auckland (he had succeeded to the title in 1814) instead. The reason for the switch has never been explained, though it is hard not to believe that Palmerston was behind it. Auckland had been on terms of intimacy with him for some time, and during his term at the Board of Trade corresponded with him regularly. Palmerston may have regarded Auckland as a 'safe man' who would carry out his bidding without too much argument; and in the event he proved right. Auckland (to quote Vincent Smith) '... was an able and conscientious man but he lacked the personality to dominate a situation and was prone to be influenced by spirits more ardent than his own'. Smith also accuses him of having 'a vein of moral weakness which led him to acts which still seem in perspective to be wholly out of character'. Altogether, one

might say, he was an able enough administrator when times were quiet, but no man for a crisis; and soon after his arrival in February 1836 it was a crisis he had to face.

Before turning to this, however, it is necessary to devote a short space to British methods of governing their Indian territories at this time. The latter did not come directly under the Crown, but were held by the proprietors and directors of the East India Company (a private body) 'in trust for His Majesty, his heirs and successors, for the service of the Government of India'. The Charter Act, from which this passage is quoted had been passed in 1833, designed to last for twenty years. The East India Company was run by a Court of Directors numbering twenty-four, a quarter of whom retired each year. There was no limit to their authority over the Government of India, so it was laid down, 'with the exception that in all matters other than patronage the Board of Control might compel them to act as it pleased'. The Court could recall the Governor-General or any other servant, so long as Parliament did not choose to intervene. There is no record of its doing so, but, on the other hand, successive Governors were treated rather roughly; sometimes they were looked on as little more than regional executives. The Board of Control virtually meant the President of the Board, who was a member of the cabinet. This minister, however, had no power to write the Governor-General direct, and from his office in Cannon Row communicated with the Court of Directors in Leadenhall Street. The Court, however, were bound by law to obey any instructions received from the President, and send him copies of all proceedings and letters they received. This circuitous arrangement worked fairly well where routine matters were concerned, but Her Majesty's Government (Victoria ascended to the throne four years after the Charter Act was passed) refused to communicate confidential matters to twenty-four citizens, and so a Secret Committee had to be formed, the members of which were sworn in. When the Governor-General wrote a

'Secret letter' he addressed it to the Secret Committee instead of the Court, and the Committee was bound to send it to the President. The latter, of course, acted with the knowledge of the Cabinet, and so, despite the asinine administrative arrangement, the latter's commands were eventually put into operation. Naturally, the Court of Directors, being powerful men, had their own representatives in the House of Commons, and through these could exercise indirect checks on government action. Finally, the whole system was frequently reduced to absurdity by the use of 'D.O.', that is demi-official, and private letters. The Governor-General could write privately to the President, the Prime Minister, or any other member of the Cabinet. Auckland, as we have seen, kept up a regular correspondence with Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary. Within India the Government consisted of the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, and three members of Council. Their duties were 'the superintendence, direction, and control of the civil and military government of the territories and revenues of India'.

The British territories at this time, it should be remembered, by no means included the whole of the Indian sub-continent. For the most part they comprised Bengal, Bihar, and large tracts of eastern India, the United Provinces, the North-West Provinces reaching up towards Delhi, Madras in the south, and Bombay province in the west. In central India the Nizam of Hyderabad ruled a vast state, as did the ruler of Oudh in the north; Ranjit, as we know, ruled over 100,000 square miles in the Punjab, and to the south and west Rajputana and Sind were still independent. Altogether, India was an ungainly patchwork of states and rules, and the only thing which could be said with any certainty was that the territory governed by the British was growing steadily.

But it is time to return to Lord Auckland, Ranjit Singh, and the durbar at Ferozepore. This came to an end on the 30th November, when the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, manoeuvred his forces

in battle formation, launching them to attack imaginary enemies with great élan. Ranjit Singh declared himself most impressed; then on the following day made his farewells and returned with his retinue to Lahore, dragging his newly acquired howitzers behind him. The Bengal Army, 9,500 men all told, including artillery, struck its tents and on the 2nd December began the long march towards the Indus and Afghanistan. It cannot be said that it marched with any great enthusiasm, and rumours abounded that Sir Henry thought so little of the project that he had refused to go. The project was, in simple terms, to remove the Amir, Dost Mohammed, from his throne at Kabul, and install in his place the exiled monarch, Shah Shuja. This was the first time in history that a British army had approached, let alone crossed, the North-West Frontier of India, and it is necessary to go back a few years in time to explain how such an extraordinary event came about.

From the early years of the century Russia had been exerting pressure on Persia in the Caucasus, and, greatly alarmed, the Shah turned to Britain for help. But Britain was preoccupied with Napoleon, and it wasn't until 1814 that an Anglo-Persian treaty was negotiated, by which the British pledged to go to the aid of Persia if she were attacked by a European power, either by sending arms or providing a subsidy. But even as the treaty was being signed the Russians were moving forward again and soon forced on Persia a treaty whereby the latter was robbed of the right to maintain warships in the Caspian Sea and agreed to recognise the Russian occupation of Georgia. In 1828 the Russians increased their pressure, and by the treaty of Turkmanchai consolidated their possessions south of the Caucasus. British policy at this time was pusillanimous, to say the least, and the Persians came to the conclusion that their best course was to try to compensate their losses in the west by attacking Afghanistan to the east. In this enterprise they were encouraged by the Russians, and in due course the plan crystallised into a campaign against Herat, the Afghan town standing on

the western flank of the Hindu Kush, and guarding the road to Kandahar and India.

Herat is an ancient town which has been scourged by many conquerors from the Genghis Khan onwards; for years it flourished under Tamerlane, and in the early sixteenth century the Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara made it the most famous centre of literature, culture, and art in the whole of Central and Western Asia. According to Arnold Toynbee, the historian, who paid a visit in 1960, Herat is a beautiful, mellow city, harbouring the tombs of many poets and great men. But 'the beauty of Herat does not lie in the details, however lovely each of these, singly, may be. It lies in the panorama of the city embowed in its valley.' But, unfortunately, despite its beauty and its tactical importance, Herat is very susceptible to an attack from the east.

In the early 1830's the Persian schemes were delayed by the deaths of the Shah and his heir-apparent, which occurred within a few months of each other, but with the accession of the Shah Mohammed Mirza they soon revived. By July 1835 Palmerston was writing to Sir Henry Ellis, the British representative in Teheran, telling him 'to warn the Persian Government against allowing themselves to be pushed on to make war against the Afghans'. Ellis replied in November—one must realise that letters at this time often took months to be delivered—that the Shah now had 'very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan ... and conceives that the right of sovereignty over Herat and Kandahar is as complete now as in the reign of the Safavi dynasty'. (The latter was a sixteenth-century dynasty during which Herat had belonged to Persia.) It was soon after this correspondence had passed that Auckland arrived in India; but before he could understand the situation in detail, let alone formulate a plan, it was complicated by the arrival of a letter from Dost Mohammed. The Afghans had recently defeated Ranjit Singh's army near Jamrud, at the mouth of the Khyber, but had refrained from reoccupying Peshawar. Dost Mohammed wanted to enlist the aid of the

British in coming to a more permanent settlement, and wrote Lord Auckland accordingly. The latter, however, did not take the request very seriously, and replied that it wasn't British practice to interfere with the affairs of independent states. He added, however, that he had a project in mind for the development of the Indus basin and would be sending a representative to discuss various commercial matters with the Amir. In due course the representative was chosen—Captain Alexander Burnes, a young Scotsman, who was to play an increasingly important role in the drama to come, a role that was to end in tragedy.

The reasons for his selection are clear enough. As a young officer in the Company's army he had distinguished himself as a translator of Persian and a cartographer. He was a witty talker and wrote amusing accounts of his experiences which commended him to his superiors, and when in 1830 it was decided that a gift of horses should be sent to Ranjit Singh (as a pretext for discovering more about his regime), Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay, chose Burnes for the job, Burnes—always an opportunist—went on from Lahore to Simla, where he reported to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, and somehow persuaded him to sponsor further travels through Afghanistan and Central Asia. In Kabul he was graciously received by Dost Mohammed, for whom he developed a great liking, then pushed on over the Hindu Kush to the Oxus valley, and from there to Meshed, Bokhara, and Teheran. Arriving in London in 1833, he became an immediate celebrity, and all the great hostesses invited him to come and tell his stories. At Holland House he enjoyed a considerable success, and soon the learned societies were after him, followed by the statesmen. Needless to add, his book of travels was a best-seller. Burnes was not the first traveller in modern times to reach Kabul; before the close of the eighteenth century an Englishman called Forster had traversed Afghanistan and reached the borders of the Caspian. Thirty years later, in 1823, Mountstuart Elphinstone published his

book of travels which was virtually to become a textbook on Afghanistan. In 1819 two more Englishmen, Moorcroft and Trebeck, set out on a journey of exploration which was to last six years; and they were followed by a Scot, Edward Stirling, who was serving in the Bengal Civil Service, then Arthur Connolly, a Cavalry officer. But their accounts stirred up little interest and were soon forgotten. It was Burnes who arrived at the right time, when the thrill of exploration was in the air and the Russian advance across the Central Asian desert had brought Afghanistan into the news. Nothing could prevent his early promotion, and soon a knighthood was added to mark the approval of the Establishment; seldom have the talents of a young officer brought such a swift reward.

But many men graced with a surface brilliance have flaws of character underneath, and Burnes was no exception. According to Sir Henry Durand, his ambition 'was too hot a flame for the cautious fulfilment of his duty. . . . Sanguine, credulous, never pausing to weigh events, and not gifted with a comprehensive mind, he was easily carried away. . . .' Maud Diver, the novelist, whose sources are usually very accurate, castigates his moral behaviour, asserting: 'Wisely adopting Mohammedan dress, he unwisely adopted Mohammedan habits of life; including the harem. . . . His lack of dignity and diplomatic caution . . . alienated the respect of the chiefs.' Some criticisms were no doubt motivated by malice or jealousy, but there can be no doubt that there was a good deal of truth in them. However, in 1837 all the world had seen of Burnes was his brilliance and enterprise; and in the autumn of that year he headed north for Kabul, with two assistants, to renew his acquaintance with Dost Mohammed.

Although Auckland had intimated his idea of sending a representative to Kabul soon after his arrival in India, the plan was no doubt brought to realisation by a dispatch from the Secret Committee, dated 25th June 1837. This instructed him 'to watch more closely than has been hitherto attempted the progress of events in Afghanistan

and to counteract the progress of Russian influence'. The mode of doing this was left to his discretion, the dispatch merely indicating that he might send a confidential agent, or adopt 'any other measures that may appear to you to be desirable in order to counteract Russian influence in that quarter, should you be satisfied ... that the time has arrived when it would be right for you to interfere decidedly in the affairs of Afghanistan'. A more intelligent man might have realised from this document that a situation was blowing up which demanded an experienced mission, not merely an enterprising young Scotsman. But Auckland merely went ahead as planned, not even bothering to summon Burnes for consultation before he left.

Burnes, it will be remembered, went purely on a commercial mission and had no powers to commit the Government of India. But, in the event, his first conference with Dost Mohammed made him realise that the latter had no interest in commercial matters or the development of the Indus basin; what he wanted was help to recover Peshawar from the Sikhs, whom, he declared, had basely wrested it from him while he was engaged in a war with Shah Shuja, who was attempting to recover the throne. Except for murmuring politely that the British Government would do all it could to ensure peace between the Sikhs and Afghans, Burnes could make no reply; and before further instructions could be obtained, news arrived that Kohun Dil Khan, the chief of Kandahar, was intriguing with the Persians and Russians. Meanwhile, Auckland had realised the inadequacy of Burnes' brief, and about the 8th September 1837 ordered his chief adviser, Sir William Macnaghten, to send off new instructions. These, though rather vague, completely altered the nature of Burnes' mission, robbing it of any commercial objects and substituting political intelligence instead. Burnes, of course, was completely unequipped for this new role: Auckland had blundered.

Macnaghten, the official who drafted the instructions, proved to be a controversial character, just as Burnes and

Auckland himself, and some critics have held him primarily responsible for the disasters to come. Sir Henry Durand has charged that he allowed 'phantasms of remote danger to warp his judgment'. General MacMunn described him as 'a Secretariat man pure and simple ... in service jargon [he] had "never held the baby", had never been called on to handle men and affairs on the spot'. Fraser-Tytler argues that he never 'grasped the realities of the Afghan situation'. Sir John Kaye considers him a baffling character. He was undoubtedly a brilliant linguist and scholar, he had a quick brain and never stopped working, but—'Most men have an unhappy faculty of believing what they wish to be true. In Macnaghten this propensity was unnaturally developed. God had cursed him with a strong delusion that he should believe a lie ...' It was certainly an evil fate which allied him with Auckland and Burnes.

But to return to Burnes' new instructions, which were dispatched from Calcutta on the 11th September. 'The quiet and unassuming character of your mission ...' Macnaghten wrote, 'will, owing to recent events, be very much changed; and instead of your being merely the bearer of an invitation to the Amir of general friendship ... in matters of commerce, you may be looked for as an arbiter of peace, and possibly of a supporter of extravagant pretensions'. As it went on, the dispatch grew even more vapid, and the only lucid clause asserted that, whatever arrangements for Peshawar were discussed, 'the honour and just wishes of our old friend and firm ally Ranjit Singh' must be given priority. Burnes still had no direct political power, and his only possible role was to argue and report. When Dost Mohammed realised this—which was fairly soon—their exchanges lost any sense of reality. However, Burnes did learn Dost Mohammed's views on a number of matters, and in an able dispatch pointed out that our alliance with the Sikhs was a diminishing asset; that when Ranjit Singh died, which he must do fairly soon, all stability would vanish. Meanwhile, by giving his interests complete priority over those of Dost

Mohammed, we were driving the latter towards the arms of Russia.

Burnes already had concrete evidence for this last assertion. On the 19th November the Amir had advised him that a Russian agent, Captain Vickovitch, was on his way with a letter from the Tsar. This was in reply to a letter from himself, imploring the Tsar's help against the Sikhs. Dost Mohammed was very frank about the whole matter, asserting that he did not wish to receive agents from any other power if he could gain sympathetic consideration from the British. He even volunteered to refuse to receive the Russian but Burnes thought any such action unnecessary, and when Vickovitch arrived he naturally tried to discover the exact nature of his mission. In these efforts he was unsuccessful; but, as Dost Mohammed's manner remained friendly to him and grew increasingly cold towards the Russian, he was not unduly depressed.

What was depressing was the onward march of the Persian armies towards Herat. Leaving Teheran on the 23rd July they had lumbered across the plain, and on the 15th November had taken Ghorian, a fortress forty miles from Herat. On the 1st December the siege of Herat itself began, and according to reports it could not hold out very long. At this time Lord Auckland was engaged on a leisurely progress through India, divorced by some hundreds of miles from the Council in Calcutta and the apparatus of government. Despite the news from Afghanistan, he apparently saw no reason to change his plans, or to vary his attitude towards Dost Mohammed. When Burnes' latest dispatch arrived, urging him to decide which he would support—the Afghans or the Sikhs—Auckland told Macnaghten to snub him. The Governor-General, Burnes was told icily, did not agree with his proposals. Dost Mohammed's correct course was to make overtures for peace and endeavour 'to appease the feelings of the powerful monarch whom he had offended'. If he did this, and at the same time relinquished 'alliances with any power to the westward', he could rely on British

goodwill, but not otherwise. If Dost refused to take this course he would have to accept the consequences, and Burnes should request the dismissal of his mission and return to Peshawar.

This letter, which was sent on the 20th January 1838 and received some time in March, rendered any further negotiations in Kabul quite hopeless and on the 26th April Burnes left for Peshawar. En route he reported to Auckland at Simla and warned him that Dost Mohammed was now in earnest negotiation with the Russian agent, Captain Vickovitch.

Meanwhile at Herat some extraordinary things had been happening. A few weeks ahead of the invading Persians there had arrived, wearing Eastern dress, a young Irish artillery officer by the name of Eldred Pottinger. Like Burnes, he had a taste for travel, and had obtained permission from the East India Company's army to travel to Khurasan. Pottinger was the beau ideal of a Victorian hero, tall, strong, handsome, virtuous, religious, utterly courageous, and industrious. Finding himself in Herat at the outbreak of war, he did not move on at the first opportunity, but stayed and aroused the people to fight. He showed them how to organise the defences, to repair the walls, to site the guns, and repel invaders. The result was that, instead of surrendering to the Persian hosts, the Heratians began resisting. Whenever their spirits flagged under the bombardment from the Shah's artillery Pottinger would be among them, driving, urging, encouraging. In April the city had still not succumbed. Pottinger's arrival had, in fact, proved one of the extraordinary accidents of military history.

As it so happened, there was a British officer with the Persians, a Lieutenant-Colonel Stoddart, who belonged to the Military Mission at Teheran. When Pottinger arrived in the Shah's camp on a mission from the rulers of Herat, Stoddart was naturally somewhat amazed. But the attempted mediation of these two officers with the Shah was quite fruitless: he intended to take Herat, he told them, and wanted no argument. So Pottinger went back

to his headquarters in the city and fought on. But his opinion, which he communicated to Burnes in a letter delivered just before he left Kabul, was that Herat could not survive beyond the end of April.

In fact it held on a good deal longer, though its situation remained precarious and its people on the borders of starvation. But however bad the news, Lord Auckland pursued his chosen path, unflurried, unhurried, and immovable in his opinions. However, in June he asked Burnes for his advice on the best methods for counteracting Dost Mohammed's drift towards Russia, and Burnes, in a last effort to get his views accepted, wrote bluntly: 'Dost Mohammed ... is a man of undoubted ability: and if half you do for others were done for him ... he would abandon Persia and Russia tomorrow.... The man has much to be said for him ... and if Afghans are proverbially not to be trusted I see no reason for having greater mistrust in him than of others.' These observations were sound and logical and in accord with everything that Burnes had pleaded before. But in the same letter he wrote that if Dost Mohammed were to be replaced on the throne of Kabul 'the British Government have only to send Shuja-ul-Mulk to Peshawar with an agent and two of its regiments, as honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause to ensure his being fixed for ever on his Throne'.

This suggestion, to quote Fraser-Tytler, 'was a strange and fatal blunder.... It savours of weakness, of a desire ... "to tell Master something he wanted to hear".' Nevertheless, Auckland accepted it with immediate enthusiasm and relief, as did Macnaghten and his staff. This was the move he was looking for: in one blow he would comfort his firm ally, Ranjit Singh, remove the aggravating Dost Mohammed, warn the Persians, and advise the Russians that he was not to be trifled with. With his own nominee in power at Kabul, and Afghanistan firmly under British paramountcy, the balance of power would be automatically restored in favour of the British.

Shuja-ul-Mulk was none other than the deposed mon-

arch, usually known as Shah Shuja. Since being thrown out by Dost Mohammed in 1810 he had made repeated efforts to regain power, first with the aid of the Sikhs and later with the Persians. For a time he was able to hold Peshawar, but then the Governor of Attock seized him in 1812 and for a year he found himself a prisoner in Kashmir. Later on he was supported by the Rajah of Kistawar, a Himalayan state adjoining Kashmir, but finding no direct military aid he threw himself under the protection of the British at Ludhiana. In 1818 and again in 1834 he had made abortive attempts to invade Afghanistan, but now his fortunes were low, and there was nobody left to whom he could turn for help. However, it so happened that he had impressed the British agent at Ludhiana, Captain Wade. For some time before Burnes' fateful letter Wade had been singing the praises of Shah Shuja, and passing on information received from Masson, an agent beyond the Indus, which indicated that he was popular in Afghanistan and would be received with enthusiasm. Burnes had seen Masson's reports, too, and chose to rely on them rather than his own observation and judgment. The extraordinary thing is that Masson was by profession an antiquary, and without any training or qualifications as a political intelligence officer. He probably wasn't paid for his services, and he certainly hadn't penetrated to central Afghanistan. As far as one can judge, his reports were neither checked nor corroborated, and the reason for their unquestioning acceptance by Captain Wade is problematical. Perhaps (as Sir Henry Durand alleges) Wade was utterly fatuous, or perhaps he had taken such a liking to Shah Shuja that this coloured his professional judgment. All one can say for certain is that Masson, the obscure antiquary, was responsible for a major and disastrous change in British policy.

As for Shah Shuja, it is generally accepted that he had a dignified but winning way about him, and an evident desire to please. Mountstuart Elphinstone had written of him in glowing terms fifteen years earlier. But a ruler needs more than charming manners, and except for his

pertinacity Shah Shuja's virtues were somewhat shadowy. However, enthusiasm for him in the British camp grew steadily, and from the talk of the advisers and secretaries one might have thought him a mixture of Alexander and Charlemagne. If anyone had doubts they are certainly not recorded.

But it was one thing to decide that a new monarch should be installed in Kabul and quite another to put the plan into action. Pondering the matters at his headquarters in Simla in May 1838 Auckland came to the conclusion that the key to the question lay in the Sikhs. They had already backed Shah Shuja's attempt to regain the throne in 1834 and were still in treaty relations with him. If, therefore, Ranjit Singh's army could head north in support of the force led by Shah Shuja and financed by the British the matter could be accomplished without too great an expenditure of effort. All the British need do (except for providing limited finance) would be to furnish a few staff officers and political advisers. Whether Auckland considered the feelings of the Afghans at all is very doubtful; probably he comforted himself with the fact that internecine warfare was their national pastime, and, reasoned that as they had changed their loyalties eight times in the last forty-five years, they could change again.

But the question now was: would Ranjit Singh co-operate? Macnaghten, dispatched hurriedly to his court at Lahore, found him in a receptive frame of mind. For the British to become a party to his treaty with Shah Shuja, he declared grandiloquently, 'would be adding sugar to milk'. So the tripartite agreement was drawn up and signed, and arrangements between Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja (once he was on the throne) were discussed in detail. The military arrangements, the question of whose forces were to be used and in what numbers, were, however, skated over very swiftly. Macnaghten merely asked Ranjit whether he would like his own army to act independently, or whether he would prefer to act in concert with the British, and naturally he chose the latter

alternative. But by some mysterious process, as negotiations went on during June and July, the British role grew and Ranjit's diminished. By the 13th August, Lord Auckland was writing to the Secret Committee that he had decided 'to give the direct and powerful assistance of the British Government to the enterprise of Shah-ul-Mulk, in a degree which was not in the first instance contemplated by me, from a conviction, confirmed in the most decided manner by every opinion of authority on the subject, that the measure could not be trusted mainly to the support of the Sikh ruler . . . '.

Ranjit Singh, of course, had never intended to risk his beloved regiments in the north-western passes. He knew the Afghans at close quarters, and indeed, it was the Afghan, Zaman Shah, who, forty years earlier, had appointed him Governor of the Punjab. He knew how the tribes could fight in the mountain passes and how bitterly they would resent any foreign intrusion. Even when offering his co-operation the shrewd old profligate sensed that Lord Auckland had the bit between his teeth, and before long British troops would be committed. All he had to do was make sympathetic noises and wait, and the British would rid him of Dost Mohammed and clear up the Peshawar situation of their own volition.

While Ranjit Singh knew the Afghans, knew the country across the Indus, and the approaches to Afghanistan, Lord Auckland did not. The formidable military and logistical problems facing his adventure were only dimly perceived by him; all he knew was that he had to go on. It is doubtful even if the situation at Herat was the main spur; the city was still holding out, and Palmerston was exerting considerable pressure in the Persian Gulf. Already on the 27th July his envoy had given the Shah a solemn warning that if he persisted in his plans Britain would regard herself free to take any action she chose, including a full-scale war. Fraser-Tytler has suggested that Auckland, like so many rulers before him and after, was being sucked towards the Frontier by the mysterious forces it generates. 'There is a fate about this rest-

less frontier,' he writes, 'which has been too strong for mankind ever since the days when the Greek rulers of Bactria died fighting in face of the invading nomads till now....' Whether there is any truth in this need not be argued now, but the fact is that on the 10th September, Auckland issued orders for the mobilisation of 'the Army of Afghanistan'. Three weeks later, on the 1st October, Macnaghten issued on his behalf the Simla manifesto which declared:

'The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandisement.'

So the die was cast, and the military machine ground into action.

But how was the army to reach Afghanistan, and by which routes? The British frontier at this time lay on the Sutlej, and between its forward cantonment at Ludhiana and the Khyber Pass lay the Punjab, most of its five great rivers, and the Indus. Once the army crossed these with all its baggage and guns there would still be the difficult task of threading a way through the Khyber and the treacherous Khurd-Kabul beyond. A more westerly route to Kandahar would provide easier country, but the distance would be great—some 850 miles from Ferozepore, and another 325 miles from Kandahar to Kabul. On the other hand, the first 450 miles of the journey, as far as Sukkur, would be flanked by the Sutlej, which would not only provide water but transport. Eventually this longer route was chosen. The troops, under Major-General Sir Willoughby Cotton, would consist of three infantry brigades and one cavalry brigade. The bulk of the units would be provided by the Company's army and would consist of Bengal Native Infantry, but there would also be two battalions of British troops, the 13th Foot and the 3rd Buffs, and the 16th Lancers. This force would be supported by the Bombay division (two infantry and one

cavalry brigade) under Lieutenant-General Sir John Keane. Shah Shuja's own force would consist of six infantry battalions and two cavalry regiments, under the command of Brigadier Simpson from the 19th Bengal Infantry.

This was to be the first campaign of Victoria's reign, and the army commanders, not to mention Lord Auckland, had therefore a special reason to make a success of it. Formed up on parade, and at the durbar at Ferozepore, the troops looked magnificent, their uniforms a blaze of colour. But both native and British troops were dressed in the European fashion, in thick red tunics, shakoes, and white cross-belts. The Bengal Horse Artillery were in brass dragoon helmets with leopard-skin rolls, white buckskin breeches, and high jack-boots. Only the Irregular Horse wore uniforms suited to the climate.

If the uniforms were out of date the administrative and supply system was almost prehistoric, and based on that of the old Mogul armies. The army was supplied from what General MacMunn calls 'a huge moving city of shops which followed it pick-a-back'. The regimental agents and contractors fed the men, mended their clothing, and soled their shoes. Except for arms, ammunition, and military stores they supplied every single article they might require.¹ Apart from the merchants and contractors, there was a huge army of tent-pitchers, and once the bazaar-master gave the order (after the Quartermaster-General's staff had allocated the site) up went the city of tents. Every merchant knew his exact position in the city, and though it moved on from day to day, the geography was the same. Unfortunately, however, no sanitary arrangements were made, and once cholera or dysentery was brought into the camp it spread like lightning.

If the campaign were a long one, even this vast crowd of followers could not carry sufficient stocks, and the

¹ This system died hard and was not finally abolished till 1917. Even in 1942 when the 2nd British Division arrived in India and opened its own canteens it was promptly ordered to abolish them and take on Indian contractors.

hereditary grain carriers, especially the Brinjaras with their pack-bullocks, were contracted to bring supplies from the base. These had to be protected, and so during the years regiments of irregular cavalry had grown up. The whole system was clumsy, wasteful, and inefficient. The Bengal Army, for example, which only mustered 9,500 fighting men, took no less than 38,000 camp-followers and 30,000 camels. The wonder is not that it moved slowly but that it was able to move at all.

Regarding Cotton and Keane, all we need say of them is that even by the standards of the day they were not particularly distinguished. Cotton never seemed to realise the necessity of reconnoitring ahead, even when his army was halted for some days; and as for Keane, Sir John Kay remarks: 'Of him [the troops] knew little and what little they did know did not fill them with any very eager desire to place themselves under his command.' But in the campaign, as in any other, the opinions of the troops were not called for; and when the orders to march came through they would obey them.

At the beginning of November there was a surprising development in the military situation. Auckland received a letter from Colonel Stoddart, the envoy at Herat, dated the 10th September and informing him that the Shah of Persia, 'in compliance with the demands of the British Government', had raised the siege and was withdrawing his armies. The danger from Persia and Russia had suddenly vanished. One might think that a reasonable reaction to this news would be to cancel the expedition, or at least reconsider its advisability, but Auckland did no such thing. On the 8th November he issued an order stating that although the Shah's action was 'a cause for congratulation' he would still go ahead with his plans. His reasoning was that the expedition had never been planned principally to relieve Herat, and the situation in Afghanistan was in any case unchanged by the Shah of Persia's withdrawal. For this obstinacy he has been condemned; Kaye argues that the expedition was no more than a 'folly and a crime'. Whether Auckland was now

acting off his own bat, or in accordance with a policy laid down by the Court Directors, has been hotly disputed. Much of the argument turns on which letters had been received by whom and on which dates. But one cannot ignore, however, a secret dispatch from the Secret Committee, dated 24th October and *after* they had received the news from Herat. This lays down, for example, that 'The security of India and the North-West Frontier makes it an indispensable fact that we should establish influence and authority which later occurrences may have deprived us of.... It becomes imperative duty to adopt some course of policy by which Kabul and Kandahar may be united under a sovereign bound by every tie and interest ... to Great Britain.... Such a Prince might, we are inclined to believe, be found in the person of Shah Shuja.... We accept the opinion of the agent at Ludhiana in his letter of the 1st June 1838....' The dispatch went on to instruct Auckland that he should use so many troops that there could be no chance of failure, then declared:

'We are aware that we have recommended to you ... a series of measures which may require great exertions.... We are also aware that in carrying out our arms from the Indus we may appear to contemplate schemes of aggrandisement that every consideration both of justice and policy would induce us to condemn, but in truth there is nothing aggressive in what we propose.'

By the time Auckland received this communication the durbar at Ferozepore was over and his army was on the march. In reply to questioners he had declared that the decision was his own, solely his own; but no doubt this dispatch arrived as a great comfort to him.

Sir Willoughby Cotton and the Bengal army marched, to be exact, on the 10th December. 'It was clear, bright weather—the glorious cold season of Northern India....' Sir John Kaye recalls, 'Nature seemed to smile on the expedition, and circumstances to favour its process....' The first 450 miles were south-west down the left bank of the Sutlej, and water and supplies were plentiful. At

Sukkur the Bengal Engineers had constructed a magnificent bridge of boats over the Indus which the native sepoy showed no reluctance to cross. After the Bengal army came the Bombay troops under Keane, and by the 19th February all the men, the animals, and the massive baggage train were across. Shah Shuja and his force meanwhile crossed at Shikarpur, to the west. Now the army—soon to be known as 'the Army of the Indus'—was in Baluchistan, and its troubles began. No staff plans had been made for crossing the waterless plains of Kacha Gandava, and so as the march went on hundreds of horses and camels were lost, and the rest weakened considerably. To make matters worse, the Baluchis came down from the hills and began raiding the baggage train. The staff, in their ignorance, had imagined that they would be able to replenish supplies from local merchants as they were accustomed to do in India, but now realised to their horror that circumstances had changed entirely. To make matters worse, their old carrier system failed.

However, despite hunger, thirst, and administrative blunders, the army pushed on. On the 16th March the leading elements of Cotton's division began threading their way through the Bolan Pass, on their way to Quetta. This was the first time a British Army had negotiated any of the North-Western passes, and fortunately there was no opposition. Nevertheless, the road proved hard; more camels were lost, and a good deal of baggage was discarded. The camels each carried a day's food for 160 sepoy, and when they started going down in hundreds the supply situation deteriorated even further. Then marauders came down to harass the rear brigade, and time was lost in a number of skirmishes. However, on the 26th March, Cotton reached Quetta (at this time a dismal collection of mud houses round the Shal-kot fort), where he was ordered to wait until Keane arrived with his division. Keane, however, had tried a short cut which put him even further behind, so it was not until the 31st March that he arrived, and the 7th April that the combined army could push on. Typically, Cotton had failed

to use his time at Quetta to reconnoitre the Khojak Range which lay ahead, so had no idea which of the three passes he could select. In the event, Keane (who had now taken command) chose the worst and lost more baggage, more camels, 27,400 rounds of ammunition, and some of his spare gunpowder. When he arrived at Kandahar on the 26th April he had only two days' supply of half-rations for his men, and his cavalry had been wrecked as a fighting force, most of its horses being too emaciated to work.

But despite all the supply troubles, the situation was promising. Shah Shuja, crossing the Khojak by an easier route, had outmarched Keane and arrived in Kandahar on the 23rd, three days ahead of him. Though his reception had been a cool one and the chiefs had remained aloof, no demonstration was made by the populace. In general, the people had remained quietly indifferent. Gradually the units of the Bombay army arrived intact, and by the 3rd May the whole force was complete. Five days later Shah Shuja was formerly placed on the throne.

The next object was to march on Kabul and overthrow Dost Mohammed, but for a time the army was immobilised. The cavalry had to be largely remounted, the camels put out to graze, and the camp-followers allowed time to recover from their exhaustion. The fields around Kandahar were thick with grain, but this still had to be cut and collected, and meanwhile, to assuage their hunger, the troops bought large quantities of fruit. The result was that dysentery and a variety of stomach complaints swept through the ranks, the hospitals filled, and a good many British troops died. To complicate matters even further, a grain convoy under the Loharee chiefs had vanished somewhere in the mountains en route from India, as had the treasury which was coming from Shikarpur. Keane therefore found himself running short of cash and tried to raise a loan from the local authorities. Needless to say, they declined courteously.

In India the plight of the army was still unknown, and on the 24th May news of the 'capture of Kandahar' was

greeted with wild enthusiasm and celebrated at the Queen's Birthday Ball. 'The scene,' wrote Emily Eden, 'was Ammandale, a valley one thousand feet below Simla, where tents and a boarded platform for dancing had been set up. . . . "Victoria, God Save the Queen, and Kandahar" in huge illuminated letters adorned the great fir trees. There we were eating salmon from Scotland and sardines from the Mediterranean in the face of those high hills, some of which have remained untrodden since creation. . . . ' Fêtes champêtres, archery competitions, dances, and whist provided other diversions; the whole atmosphere was one of heady excitement. Further news from the front was expected hourly.

For some time none arrived. By the end of May, Macnaghten had so convinced himself of the ardour of Shah Shuja's reception that he was trying to persuade Keane to leave the Bombay division at Kandahar and march on Kabul with the remainder of his force. 'Not a shot will be fired,' he asserted. Initially Keane agreed, but, having discussed the suggestion with his staff, fortunately changed his mind. This hawering, however, produced a bad impression in the army; senior officers were shocked that their commander should allow the political envoy to advise him on tactical matters. Finally, Keane decided to leave two battalions of native infantry, two troops of horse artillery, some of Shah Shuja's cavalry, and his siege guns as a garrison, and on the 27th June left Kandahar for Kabul.

By now the heat was considerable, but for Afghanistan the road was good, and in the Turnuk valley forage for camels and horses was plentiful. For miles at a time in the early stages of the march the troops found themselves penned in a narrow valley, dominated by overhanging cliffs, and constantly wading across the river as the road swung from side to side. All the time they were climbing steadily. Kandahar lies at 3,340 feet, but Kalat-i-Ghilzai, eighty miles on, lies at 5,540, and Ghazni, the great fortress some 200 miles on, at over 7,000 feet. As they approached the latter the air became cooler, which was a

merciful relief. But the Ghilzais now began to show themselves, their cavalry moving parallel to the army on either flank. When any opportunity offered itself they swooped down on the baggage train, killed a few camp-followers, then made off with what they could carry. But they were not in great enough numbers to do great damage, and by the 18th July, Keane found the head of his column within two marches of Ghazni. The following day Shah Shuja arrived with his troops, and Brigadier Willshire brought up the rear with the British Infantry.

The question now facing Keane was whether Ghazni was occupied. Burnes, riding ahead of the army, brought in a report that its garrison had fled, but Keane wisely treated this with reserve. When he reached the suburbs it was to find that they were occupied in some strength, and the Afghan outposts were only driven in after some skirmishing by the light companies of the Bengal infantry. Across the vineyards were dug series of deep trenches, the vines being planted in the bottom, and these proved ideal for defence. When the walls of Ghazni came into view Keane was somewhat horrified by them. Protected by a moat, they rose up some seventy feet, and mining and escalading were out of the question. Luckily, a disgruntled nephew of Dost Mohammed had turned up, and he was able to give detailed plans of the defences. These indicated that the only hope of attack was via the Kabul gate, and so it was decided (according to Sir Henry Durand, who was there) 'to attempt to blow open the gate and so carry the fortress by a coup de main'. Stupidly, Keane advised Macnaghten of his plan and he in turn told Shah Shuja. By the 21st July, when the assault troops were in position, the Shah's babbling attendants had allowed the news to be leaked to the garrison who quite naturally stood to.

Then there was another hitch. On the night of the 21st blue light signals were observed on the hills dominating the camp to the eastward; next morning their significance became apparent as 6,000 Ghilzai cavalry came charging down the hill. The trumpets sounded the alarm, and as

the Lancers and the Bengal cavalry went out to meet the challenge the gunners went into action and shells began exploding among the Ghilzai horsemen. Soon they were in disorder, then wheeled their horses about and raced back over the crest.

The assault took place on the 23rd. With a party of engineers Henry Durand advanced towards the Kabul gate, but when he was still 150 yards away the Afghans spotted him and a hot fire came down from the ramparts. Somehow Durand, with a few sappers carrying sacks of powder, was able to hurl himself towards the foot of the gate. Here the sacks were quickly deposited, then Durand and a sergeant ran along the base of the scarp, uncoiling the fuse, while the Afghans fired at them from their loopholes, hurled lumps of earth and stones and bricks. Durand and the sergeant were hit again and again by these missiles, but fortunately escaped the bullets, and eventually reached the shelter of the sally-port. Here they tried to light the fuse, but the match failed to generate sufficient heat, and in the end Durand fired his pistol at it. This failed also, and he had to resort to matches again. Altogether the business took so long that the officer commanding the covering party imagined that Durand must have been killed. With great courage he ran towards the gate and was within a few feet of it when the gunpowder went up, hurling him back several yards. Now was the moment that the infantry should have poured through the gateway, but the bugler had been killed, and as the sappers tried to contact the nearest infantry commander complete chaos developed. At one time buglers were sounding the retreat rather than the advance, but at last General Sale got his brigade under control and pushed on through the smoke. The initial rush of the Afghan swordsmen came in so swiftly that the leading troops were pressed back and only after desperate hand-to-hand combat was the way cleared so that the companies following behind could stream into the city. Here, according to Kaye, 'there was much hard fighting. In a frenzy of despair the Afghans rushed out from their hiding places

... and plied their sabres with great effect, but only to meet with fearful retribution from the musket-fire or the bayonets of the British infantry. There was horrible confusion and much carnage. Some, in their frantic efforts to escape by the gateway, stumbled over the burning timbers and were slowly burned to death. Others were pursued and hunted in corners like mad dogs, and shot down, with a curse and a prayer on their lips. ... Many an Afghan sold his life dearly, and, though wounded and stricken down, still cut out at the hated enemy.' By night-fall the governor, Hyder Khan, had surrendered and all resistance ceased; the great fortress fell with the loss of only 200 men killed and wounded. Needless to add the Afghan losses were considerably greater, half their garrison becoming casualties.

The fall of Ghazni had an immediate impact. When Dost Mohammed received the news he ordered his son, Akbar Khan, to evacuate Jalalabad and fall back rapidly on Kabul with all the forces he could muster. This withdrawal so demoralised the Afridis guarding the Khyber Pass that they evacuated the fort of Ali Masjid at its mouth, which was then occupied by General Wade, who later advanced into the pass unopposed. Keane therefore commanded—or imagined he commanded—the route back to India.

Meanwhile Dost Mohammed concentrated his entire army, 13,000 men, at Arghandeh, west of Kabul on the Ghazni road, and riding among them, koran in hand, he urged them to fight in the name of God and His Prophet. But not a soul responded. Even his own bodyguard forsook him, and a rabble hacked his tent to pieces, seized his bedding and carpet, and made off with many of his private possessions. Giving battle was out of the question, and, friendless and crownless, the Amir fled from Kabul, covered by his son, Akbar Khan, with a handful of loyal cavalry. Hearing the news, Keane sent off Colonel Outram and a party of officers in pursuit, but they eventually returned empty handed.

On the 6th August, Sir John Keane and his party

camped outside Kabul.

On the 7th, Shah Shuja rode into the city on a white charger, with Sir Alexander Burnes at his side, followed by his personal cavalry. After thirty years in exile, the Shah could be forgiven for feeling triumphant, even though his restoration had been achieved by British bayonets; and certainly, dressed in magnificent regalia and resplendent with jewels, he looked the part of a king. Not far behind him rode Sir William Macnaghten in full diplomatic rig, then Sir John Keane with his staff and brigade commanders. But despite the brave show there was no public response. The people came to their windows and doors to stare silently and did not even salaam as their new ruler went by. This, it appears, did not worry Shah Shuja who made straight for the Bala Hissar, the citadel and palace which he had known as a boy, and chortled in childish delight. Here the British officers left him to enjoy his moment of triumph in peace. Their immediate object had been accomplished.

In Simla, needless to say, the news was received with a burst of frenzied excitement, and a new crop of balls, fêtes champêtres, and galas was launched in Lord Auckland's honour. He was the hero of the hour, whose courage and optimism had been amply justified; he was the statesman whose policy had been vindicated. In grateful recognition of his services Her Majesty's Government created him Lord Eden of Norwood.

A few, very few, voices were already asking the question which posed itself: Now that Shah Shuja was on the throne, how was he going to be kept there? But in the general mood of self-congratulation and rejoicing no one listened. No one wanted to listen. And the death of Ranjit Singh, which had occurred at Lahore, barely caused a ripple on the surface of events.

THREE

RETREAT FROM GLORY

KABUL deprives its importance from its geographical position. It stands at the convergence of great military roads, from Herat and Kandahar on the west, from Central Asia and the Hindu Kush on the north, and from India via the Khyber and the Khurd-Kabul passes on the east. The altitude is 6,000 feet, which gives the city an equable climate in summer and a cold winter. In 1839 the population was about 100,000, crowded together, as in all Eastern cities, though the general aspect was pleasing. Lieutenant Rattray, who was there during the occupation, wrote: 'Kabul . . . is well-built and handsome, and is one mass of bazaars. Every street has a double row of houses of different heights, flat-roofed and composed of mud in wooden frames. Here and there a large porch of carved wood intervenes, giving entrance to the courtyard of the residences of the nobles, in the centre of which is a raised platform of mud, planted with fruit trees and spread with carpets. A fountain plays near; and here, in the heat of the day, loll the chiefs at ease, as they smoke their pipes to the sound of sacringhi or guitars. The houses overhang the narrow streets; their windows have no glass, but consist of lattice work, wooden shutters . . . the shop windows are open to the sun, and the immense display of merchandise, fruits, game, armour, and cutlery defy description. The Grand Bazaar (or Chahar Chouk) has a substantial roof built in four arcades. . . .' The other building of note was the Bala Hissar or citadel, which commanded the whole of the city. It was cold and uncomfortable, and the army didn't much relish sharing

it with Shah Shuja and his court; but at least it was safe, and they made the best of it.

During the autumn and winter of 1839 the officers and men settled down to enjoy themselves. Prompted by Macnaghten, Shah Shuja instituted 'the Afghan Order of the Durrani Empire', and at an investiture Grand Crosses, Knight-Commanderships, and stars were handed out liberally to anyone with a claim to distinction. Sir John Keane, who had just been elevated to peerage as Lord Keane of Ghazni, had special cause to be gratified. Junior officers went in for less esoteric delights, making up parties to visit places of interest in the neighbourhood, and moving about the countryside unmolested. According to Captain John Nicholson, there was horse-racing and cricket in which 'both the chiefs and the people soon learned to take a lively interest. Shah Shuja put up a valuable sword to be run for, and several of the native gentry entered their horses. Being great gamblers in their way, they looked on with astonishment at the bowling, batting, and fagging of the English players.' In return the officers attended the Afghan cock-fighting, 'betting freely, and lost or won their rupees in the best possible humour'. When the lakes froze over, the regimental armourers were given the job of making skates, objects which aroused enormous interest among the Afghan nobles. Skating was a method of progression quite unknown to them.

Not all the sports aroused such amiable reactions. The Afghan ladies were very attractive, and by the customs of the time were allowed a great deal of freedom. The result was that a good many love affairs sprang up between them and the handsome young English officers to whom they were very much attracted. Though inevitable, these affairs were eventually to cause a good deal of trouble. As Sir John Kaye put it: 'The temptations which are most difficult to withstand, were not withstood by our English officers. The attractions of the women of Kabul they did not know how to resist. The Afghans are very jealous of their women; and there were

things done ... which covered them with shame and roused them to revenge. Complaints were made ... but in vain. The scandal was open, undisguised, notorious.' And the Afghans neither forgot nor forgave.

In September it was accepted that the occupation would have to last well into 1840, and the expense was mounting up alarmingly. General Willshire was therefore ordered to march back to India with the Bombay division, and he was followed the next month by Keane and the bulk of the cavalry. In Kabul, General Sir Willoughby Cotton took over command, while General Nott remained at Kandahar. Shah Shuja, who wanted to avoid the cold winter in Kabul, left for Jalalabad accompanied by Macnaghten and an escort of several battalions; and as the snows gradually covered the whole country, the Afghans hibernated and began some deep thinking about their future and what they should do with their imposed king.

So far, despite Macnaghten's bland assurances, the chiefs had not come in from the countryside to prostrate themselves before Shah Shuja, nor had the local governors and other distinguished men of the realm. No firm foundations of government were being laid whatsoever. Equally serious was the fact that co-operation between the British and the Afghans was deteriorating rapidly and in danger of breaking down. Macnaghten's staff, which consisted of young army officers, had been sent out to the districts with orders to help the Shah's officials take control. But the latter were often corrupt and their practices revolted the Englishmen, who, nevertheless, were bound to uphold them. Another development was that, with Macnaghten firmly in control, these young political officers took precedence over the military commanders in their districts, although the latter were frequently much senior and more experienced. The result was that feelings between the army and the Political Service (as it was called) steadily deteriorated. Also, as Cotton increasingly abdicated his military responsibilities to Macnaghten, the army began getting itself into a complete muddle.

When Shah Shuja came back to Kabul in the spring of 1840 he insisted that the army vacate the Bala Hissar. It was his palace, he complained, as well as a fortress, and with troops cluttering every inch of it his court could not function properly. Anxious not to offend the King, nor take any step which might indicate a permanent occupation, Macnaghten agreed, and communicated his decision to Cotton, who raised no objection. So the next step was taken towards disaster. A cantonment was built to the north-east of the city, by the old Kohistan road; bungalows, shops, and offices were put up, and the army proceeded to make itself comfortable. The site had been chosen for convenience, and was overlooked by the hills; security was not considered at all. Soon, as the officers sent for their wives and families who came streaming up from India in bullock-carts, 'the Folly of the Plain' (as the subalterns came to call it) became as gay as the cantonments of Calcutta or Peshawar. Everyone from the generals downwards behaved exactly as if they were in India; some went so far as to argue that *they were* in India, as the North-West Frontier now lay on the Hindu Kush. As the occupation dragged on and the cantonment grew into a thriving city, such arguments naturally gained force.

The year did not pass, however, without some major excitements. In July news arrived that the Russians were marching on Khiva, the dark walled city in Uzbekistan, 450 miles north of the Afghan border. In fact, the expedition had been planned in August the previous year when the Russians had been foiled at Herat, under the pretext that the Khirghiz Cossacks had been raiding their caravans in the area and carrying off Russian subjects as slaves. The expedition was put under General Perofski, who, when he saw the troops allotted to him, was more horrified than Wellington in the Peninsular; half of them were recruits, and of these two-thirds were Polish exiles and the rest criminals. However, he did his best to weld his 9,000 men into some semblance of a striking force; in his base at Orenburg he drilled them incessantly.

santly, made them march behind military bands to try to induce a little 'swagger', and even taught them marching songs. He was quite aware of the physical difficulties confronting him in the Ust Uri desert north of Khiva, and set up forward dumps of rations and fodder. But, in the event, the terrain, the heat, and the disastrous decision to launch the expedition at the wrong time of the year, completely defeated him. Before his force had reached half-way it was down to 1,856 men, and out of 10,500 camels only 1,500 survived by mid-April. The expedition was called off.

The threat, however, remained; as Perofski put it in an order to his troops, 'We must . . . retrace our steps towards the frontier. There we shall await the further orders of the Emperor. Our next expedition will be more fortunate.' Palmerston was of the same opinion. Writing to Auckland on the 4th July (before news of the débâcle had reached him), he remarked: 'I believe the Emperor [of Russia] is not at present desirous or prepared to attack us in India . . . but I am firmly convinced that he covets the acquisition of Khiva . . . because it is an important stage on the road to India.' Receiving this message from the Foreign Secretary, Auckland could not but fail to congratulate himself on the foresight of his policy: the further the Russians came south, the more necessary it was to push north and confront them.

The other excitement in 1840 was generated by Dost Mohammed. For some time Shah Shuja had been taunting Macnaghten with the ineffectualness of his efforts to catch the deposed monarch, who was still roaming the countryside with a small force, and the following dialogue is said to have taken place:

SHAH: I suppose if I were to catch the dog you would prevent me from hanging him.

MACNAGHTEN: It will be time enough to talk about that when Your Majesty has caught him.

Following this exchange, on the 31st October Mac-

Macnaghten wrote to Auckland that should the King somehow capture Dost Mohammed 'I shall request His Majesty not to execute him till I can ascertain your Lordship's sentiments'. Six days later the question ceased to be academic, for Dost Mohammed and his troops advanced to within forty miles of Kabul. General Sale moved up rapidly to meet him and the two forces met at Parwandarra in the Nijrao hills. When Dost Mohammed saw the British cavalry he raised his sword and shouted: 'Follow me. Or I am a lost man.' The Afghans charged and cut through the British cavalry, who, despite the bravery of their officers, showed little fight, and, after hacking any dismounted men to pieces, the Afghans advanced to clear the field. In panic, Burnes wrote off to Macnaghten advising that Sale's force must retire, and urging that all available forces should be concentrated for the defence of the capital. But then quite suddenly the situation changed. The evening after the skirmish at Purwandurrah, Macnaghten was taking his evening ride outside the city when he saw two horsemen approaching. One of them galloped up to him and announced breathlessly that the Amir was approaching. Macnaghten just had time to ask, somewhat puzzled 'Which Amir?' when Dost Mohammed rode up, and, flinging himself from his horse, tendered the hilt of his sword, and said solemnly: 'Sir William, I have come to claim your protection.' Calmly Macnaghten handed back his sword and asked him to remount, then side by side they rode into the city. Here during the next few days Dost Mohammed was visited by Cotton and many of the senior officers, who were very impressed, and drew striking comparisons between the Amir and the King. Shah Shuja, incensed, refused to receive his relative, exclaiming: 'I couldn't bring myself to show common civility to the villain.' There seemed to be no question, however, of any trial or execution; and on the 12th November Dost Mohammed was sent under escort to India.

During 1841 the position, both military and political, steadily deteriorated. The King bitterly complained

of the restraints put on him; and the army came to the firm conclusion that the regime was a misbegotten one, and most of the King's ministers and agents needed shooting. In Calcutta and London Treasury officials were already composing barbed minutes on the cost of the occupation; and Auckland was under increasing pressure to make economies. Luckily for him, Palmerston was still backing his policy, and indeed on the 22nd January had written: 'Now is the time to belay in Asia; make fast what you have gained in Afghanistan, secure the Kingdom of Kabul, and make yourself sure of Herat.' But by the spring, however, costs had spiralled to such an extent that some action had to be taken, and reluctantly Auckland cut off the subsidies which had been paid to the Afghan chiefs in an effort to win their co-operation.

The reaction was immediate. Three Ghilzai chiefs, who had already proclaimed their hatred of the British at a meeting on the 12th January, raised the standard of revolt and occupied the Khurd-Kabul Pass, to the south of the capital. General Sale and his column, who were returning to India, had to fight their way through, and occupied Jalalabad. Soon all the eastern Ghilzais were in revolt, and there were murmurings around the capital. By a cruel stroke of fate the command of Kabul had been handed over by Cotton to an ageing and decrepit general by the name of Elphinstone. If Cotton was undistinguished, weak, and lacking tenacity of purpose, he was still a military genius compared with his successor, who must surely rate as one of the most supine, stupid officers ever given command. Ironically, he had already informed Auckland of his incapacity when the appointment was mooted: he was ill and on the brink of retirement, he explained, and might also have added that his eyesight and his nerve were failing. His objective wasn't Kabul but Cheltenham. However, with a complete disregard to the lives of his troops, Auckland insisted; and the old man dragged his weary bones north through the passes. So another step was taken towards disaster.

At the beginning of November, Palmerston received a

private letter from Auckland in which he said 'we write with anticipation of fresh excitement in Afghanistan'—and for once his prophecy came true. At 8 a.m.* on the 2nd November, Macnaghten received an urgent message from Burnes, who was still living in the city, that there was a disturbance, though he hoped he could deal with it. Later on, flames and smoke could be seen issuing from the neighbourhood of his residence, and rumours circulated that he had been murdered. Soon these were confirmed, and Macnaghten learned that the mob had burst into Burnes' house, killed the guards, then slaughtered Burnes himself. Two subalterns who went to his aid were killed also.

Now was the time for decisive action, but Elphinstone merely sat up in bed and listened to advice from anyone who might choose to come in and give it. He made no attempt to call an 'orders group', or even to discuss matters with Macnaghten. In the evening he merely wrote to him: 'We must see what the morning brings, and then think what can be done. . . .' Needless to say, the next morning and each one that followed it brought new disasters.

The only positive action was taken by Brigadier Shelton, who occupied the Bala Hissar with a body of troops. His orders were 'to maintain a sharp force on the city from the howitzers and guns, and to endeavour to fire the houses by means of shells. . .'. The reasoning behind this order was presumably that, when they saw their homes burning, the Afghans would give up; but instead they rose in larger numbers, and the Bala Hissar was cut off. On the 4th it was discovered that the King's Garden had been occupied and the fort of Mohammed Sharif, which meant that the cantonment was isolated from the commissariat fort, where the supplies were kept. Then the latter, which was defended by an Ensign Warren and a hundred men, came under heavy attack, and attempts to reinforce it were beaten off with heavy loss. At 9 p.m. Elphinstone called a conference at which it was agreed that Warren must be helped at all cost, and a night

operation was planned. This did not get going, however, till dawn when, to their amazement, the troops moving into the attack found Warren and his men coming forward to meet them. He had abandoned the commissariat fort and all the supplies in it. When being asked his reason, he replied insolently: 'I will give my reasons to the court of inquiry'—but in the ensuing chaos no inquiry was ever called.

After two days of heavy but indeterminate fighting Elphinstone found himself unable to continue active command, and called in Brigadier Shelton from the Bala Hissar. Like the General, Shelton had fought at Waterloo, but, despite his great physical courage, seems to have been a cantankerous individual of limited ability. According to his account of the meeting he was put 'in charge of the cantonments' but was unable to carry out the job as everything he did was corrected by Elphinstone, who 'reminded me that he commanded, not I'. Elphinstone complains on the other hand that 'I did not receive from [Shelton] that cordial co-operation . . . I had a right to expect; on the contrary, his manner was most contumacious; from the day of his arrival he never gave me information or advice. . . .' The situation was, of course, not only Gilbertian but tragic; if Elphinstone was too sick to command he should have handed over completely. Shelton, seeing the state of his commander, should undoubtedly have called a conference of senior officers, then taken charge himself. Such an action would have required moral courage, but it was the only possible course if the army were to be saved. It was never taken.

By mid-November, Shelton was at loggerheads with Macnaghten also. The envoy, with his facile optimism, was still confident that the army could last out the winter in Kabul, and opposed any preparations for a retreat. The key to the situation, he insisted, was General Sale's force at Gandamak, and if this marched north to the capital the Afghans could still be decisively defeated. Repeated messages were dispatched to Sale, who decided for excellent reasons to move on Jalalabad and stay there. Shel-

ton, however, was confident that sooner or later the force at Kabul would have to retreat, and instead of action there was argument. On the 10th Shelton and other officers went to Elphinstone and urged that the Rikabashi fort (a small building overlooking the cantonment), which the Afghans had now occupied, should be taken. It was within musket range, and the fire from its snipers was becoming rather serious. Elphinstone havered, however, and it was only when Macnaghten supported Shelton that he finally gave way. Hurriedly a plan was worked out and the storming party under Shelton moved up on to its start-line; then, just as the order to advance was to be given, Elphinstone turned up with an aide and remarked, 'I think we had better give it up.' To this the aide replied, 'Then why not countermand it at once?' So Elphinstone gave the order and the troops returned to the cantonments. Here two hours of bitter argument and vituperation took place before Elphinstone gave way, and the operation was put on again. By now all surprise had been lost, and the troops were disgusted and demoralised by the vacillations of their commanders. However, they fought with tremendous courage, and though the plan was a bad one and the slaughter considerable, gained their objective. The following day 600 maunds—about twenty tons—of wheat were found in the fort and safely brought back into the cantonment. Also some villagers, seeing the troops' success in battle, plucked up courage to bring in some supplies. As only two days' rations were left, this addition was more than welcome.

But the tactical situation continued to deteriorate. On the 13th the Ghilzais occupied the Bemaru heights in great strength, and it was obvious that something would have to be done about them. When Shelton broached the question, however, there was more argument, and Elphinstone would only consent to an operation at all when Macnaghten took the responsibility. The attack went in late, in column, and the Afghan cavalry, seeing their opportunity, launched into one of their lightning charges. As the battle was fought close by the canton-

ment, it was watched anxiously by the women and children. Among them was Lady Sale, whose journal is surely one of the most remarkable war diaries by a woman ever published. 'The Afghan cavalry charged furiously down the hill upon our troops...' she writes. 'No squares were formed to receive them. All was a regular confusion: my very heart felt as if it had leapt to my teeth when I saw the Afghans ride clean through them. The onset was fearful. They looked like a great cluster of bees, but we beat them and drove them up again.' Now it came the turn of the Horse Artillery. Under Lieutenant Vincent Eyre (who was later to become Sir Vincent, and an historian of the campaign) they came rapidly into action from the cover of a gorge and 'from this position ... soon cleared that plain, which was covered with horsemen ... we were successful on all points'. All this effort would be wasted, however, if the Ghilzais' guns, dominating the cantonment, could not be captured, and one was taken without difficulty by the Shah's 6th Infantry. The troops detailed to bring down the second gun, however, came under such a hot fire that they shrank from their duty and bolted, so it was left to Eyre to spike the gun. Meanwhile an attack had developed against the cantonment, and it wasn't until eight o'clock that this was beaten off. By then the British losses were heavy, but with the capture of the guns, the day was counted a limited success. It was the last time there was any success whatsoever to record, even a glimmer of it. 'Henceforward...' says Eyre, 'it becomes my weary task to relate a catalogue of errors, disasters, and difficulties, which, following close on each other, disgusted our officers, disheartened our soldiers, and finally sunk us all into irretrievable ruin, as though Heaven itself ... for its own inscrutable purposes had planned our downfall.'

The catalogue opened when Major Pottinger (the 'hero of Herat') came in with a subaltern, both of them wounded in several places, to announce that his detachment guarding Charikar had been wiped out. All Kohistan, to the north, was in revolt. On the 16th news arrived

that Sale had ignored the appeals for help and marched to Jalalabad. It was now obvious that no help would come from that quarter, so Macnaghten urged that the troops should abandon the cantonment and move into the Bala Hissar, where they would at least be secure. But neither Elphinstone nor Shelton would agree to this: they argued that the carriage of the sick and wounded would be difficult, there would be no firewood, the enemy would greet the loss of the cantonment as a defeat, and probably attack the army as it moved. What Elphinstone and Shelton were agreed on was that the army should retreat to India, but Macnaghten wouldn't consider this. In a long letter—one of the oddities of this campaign is that everyone was busy writing, even in the most appalling conditions—he argued. 'We should have to sacrifice the valuable property of the government; we should have to sacrifice his Majesty. . . . I fear too, that in a retreat very few of our camp-followers would survive. . . .' What he might have added was that with retreat his policy, his reputation, and his career would have gone. On the 22nd the Afghans occupied the village of Bemaru, from which, with the aid of liberal bribes, the army had been drawing fresh supplies. That night Elphinstone held a council of war and it was agreed that a strong force should go out next morning and occupy the Bemaru hills, but Shelton, who wanted to occupy the village as well, was overruled. At daybreak the force detailed for the task went out, but for some reason took with them only one gun. The village was soon seen to be occupied, and so, under Shelton's orders, the infantry put in an attack, but this proved unsuccessful.

By now all the Afghan troops in the area had been alerted, and thousands of them came streaming towards the sound of the guns. From a hill separated from the British position by a gorge they brought down a withering fire, and Shelton realised that if he stayed where he was his force would be wiped out. So, leaving five companies near the village, he crossed the gorge with the remainder of his force (including the gun) and formed

the infantry into two squares, with the cavalry in their rear. For a time the gun fired into the massed Afghans with great effect, but in the end became so heated that it had to be taken out of action. From now on the British had to rely on their muskets and to their horror found themselves out-ranged by the Afghan jezails. Then, as the casualties mounted, the Afghan infantry, with skilful use of ground, set on the squares, which hurriedly retreated. Frantically Shelton called on the cavalry to charge, but panic had seized them and they refused to follow their officers. Keeping his head, Shelton ordered the 'halt' to be sounded, and the flying regiments turned, and re-formed their squares. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The Afghan cavalry, seeing their leader, Abdullah Khan, fall wounded from his horse, fell into confusion and fled towards the city. Macnaghten (who was watching the battle by Elphinstone) urged that the infantry should seize their chance and pursue them, but Elphinstone rejected the idea. It was far too risky, he said. The next development came swiftly; having found reinforcements, the cavalry swept back across the plain to attack the British squares. The first wave was dealt with effectively, but then some Ghilzais suddenly burst from cover and joined in the attack. The squares were beginning to waver. Shelton, who had been hit five times but somehow remained on his feet, went back a few paces to give an order, and the troops, wrongly imagining that he was deserting them, broke ranks and streamed down the hill in confusion. The rout of the British was complete. In a confused mass of infantry and cavalry they staggered back into the cantonment, harassed and cut down by the encircling horsemen. 'This...' wrote Brigadier Shelton, 'concluded all exterior operations.'

Shelton had been damned by everyone who took part in or who saw the action. Lady Sale wrote: 'The misfortunes of the day are mainly attributable to Shelton's bad generalship....' According to Vincent Eyre: 'In this miserable and disastrous affair no less than six great errors must present themselves, even to the most unprac-

tised eye.... All have heard of the British squares at Waterloo, which defied repeated desperate onsets of Napoleon's choicest cavalry. At Bemaru we formed squares to resist the distant fire of infantry, thus presenting a solid mass against ... the best marksmen in the world....' Shelton said later that he didn't form squares, but merely threw back his flanks en potence, but the evidence is against him. The presence of the single gun absolutely damns him; two could have stemmed the Afghans, and a troop destroyed them.

It was at this time that news of the Afghan uprising reached Lord Auckland in Calcutta. Immediately he went into a black mood of despair, and seemed incapable of taking any decisive action to remedy the situation. 'It seems to me that we are not to think of marching fresh armies,' he wrote on the 1st December, 'for the re-conquest of that which we are likely to lose.... The difficulty will not be one of fighting and gaining victories, but of supplies, of movements, and of carriage. The troops in Afghanistan are sufficiently numerous. They would but be encumbered by great numbers, and reinforcements could not arrive before the crisis will have passed. If the end is to be disastrous, they would but increase the extent of the disaster.' This pathetic, illogical, and despicable letter indicates, perhaps as clearly as anything he ever wrote or said, the sheer incompetence, the stunted stature, of the man when faced with a major crisis. On the same day he wrote to Sir Jasper Nicholls, the new Commander-in-Chief, arguing that the Government of India could not afford to send a relief column to Kabul, and, in any case, it was the wrong time of the year. He then added: 'I fear that safety to the force at Kabul can only come from itself.'

This, as we know, was wishful thinking; the commanders there were as craven as Auckland himself. The only one who was really trying to face the dilemma confronting the garrison was Sir William Macnaghten; he may have been opportunist, ignorant, and misguided, but his courage was superb. Unfortunately, however, it

was allied to a pathetic faith in the power of gold, and he believed even now, that if sufficient were slid into the right palms the situation might still be retrieved. On the 25th he called a conference of the chiefs with a view to negotiating terms under which the British could retreat. But the chiefs were arrogant and offensive; Sultan Mohammed Khan declared that the Afghans had beaten the British in battle and therefore had the right to dictate terms of capitulation. He then demanded that they should surrender, giving themselves up with all their arms, ammunition, and captured treasure, as prisoners of war. Macnaghten rejected such terms out of hand; so the following day the chiefs delivered a letter stating that unless the British surrender forthwith, and left Shah Shuja to his fate, they had better prepare themselves for war. To this Macnaghten replied that 'We prefer death to dishonour and it will remain with a higher power to decide between us.' Whether by this he meant that Almighty God would favour the British as usual, it is not quite clear, but if he did the Deity was due to disappoint him.

On the 1st December the Afghans made a determined assault on the Bala Hissar, but were repulsed with great slaughter; however, they attacked the Mohammed Sherif fort (which overlooked the cantonment) with more success, and on the 6th December it had to be surrendered. On the 8th December Macnaghten wrote Elphinstone asking him to state a firm opinion 'whether or not . . . any further attempts to hold out against the enemy would merely have the effect of sacrificing His Majesty King Shuja and ourselves'. If this were the case, he added, was not the only alternative left 'to negotiate our safe retreat out of the country, on the most favourable terms possible?' The General replied that the situation was now so desperate that 'no time should be lost in entering into negotiations for a safe retreat'. So the chiefs were contacted again, and on the 11th December Sir William Macnaghten rode out with three captains to meet them on the plain near Siyah Sang. Here, after the opening formalities, he expressed regret that the former feelings between

the British and the Afghans should have been disrupted, and (to quote Eyre) stated that 'he was willing to enter into negotiations for the smoothing over of the present difficulties . . .'. He then proposed that the British should withdraw under a safe conduct and be furnished with supplies for their journey. Here Akbar Khan (Dost Mohammed's son) interrupted, declaring angrily that there was no need for supplies—the British could retreat at once, but the other chiefs silenced him. Macnaghten then read out his detailed proposals which, after two hours' discussion, were in general agreed. Captain Trevor then rode off with the chiefs 'as a hostage for the sincerity of Macnaghten' and the latter returned to the cantonments. Here he wrote a report in justification of his conduct, lamenting that the whole country had risen in rebellion, that communications were cut off, and almost every public officer 'whether paid by ourselves or his Majesty' had gone over to the chiefs. Also the troops were deserting, and starvation faced the whole army if it stayed much longer. But even in the face of this evidence he still could not face the utter destruction of his policy 'We shall part with the Afghans as friends . . .' he added, 'and I feel satisfied that any government which may be established hereafter will always be disposed to cultivate a good understanding with us . . .' Poor Macnaghten! He still had no real penetration, where it came to the Afghan character, and his time was running out.

On the 13th December, in accordance with one of the clauses of the agreement, the army began evacuating the Bala Hissar; all discipline had gone now and the troops looked little more than a rabble. Three days later the chiefs put on the pressure, refusing to provide food or forage until they had further assurances that the British would evacuate every fort in the vicinity of the cantonment. On the 18th there was the first fall of snow which covered the ground to a depth of five inches. 'Thus,' wrote Vincent Eyre, 'A new enemy entered upon the scene, which we were destined to find even more formidable than any army of rebels.' But the latter were still

pressing, and on the 20th demanded that 'a portion of our guns and ammunition should be given up. They also required Brigadier Shelton as a hostage.' This so enraged a subaltern called Sturt (Lady Sale's son-in-law) that he walked into the General's room and urged that the army should break off the treaty, grab all the transport it could lay its hands on, and march to Jalalabad with all speed. But Elphinstone declined such a course; the will to command had long deserted him.

Three days later the chiefs laid a trap for Macnaghten. Still confident that they could be bribed, he had sent his carriage as a present to Akbar Khan, and the latter, when thanking him, wrote suggesting that Amin-ullah Khan, one of the leading chiefs, should be seized and delivered to the British as a prisoner. Mohammed Khan's fort should then be swiftly reoccupied, followed by the Bala Hissar. If Macnaghten agreed to this proposal he was to sign a document and return it by the messenger. Frantically clutching at any straw and apparently consulting no one, Macnaghten signed, thereby sealing his own fate. On the 23rd December he again rode out to the plain near Siyah Sang, attended by three captains on his staff, Lawrence, Trevor, and Mackenzie. Of the cavalry escort detailed to accompany him, only sixteen troopers were ready, and, as he noticed, the ramparts of the cantonment were poorly guarded. Bitterly he remarked to his staff, 'It is all of a piece with the military arrangements throughout the siege'. If he was anxious about the coming meeting with Akbar Khan he certainly kept himself under admirable control; when his staff mentioned the possibility of treachery he remarked: 'Dangerous it [i.e. the plan] is; but if it succeeds, it is worth all the risks: the rebels have not fulfilled even one article of the treaty, and I have no confidence in them; and if by it we can only save our honour, all will be well. At any rate, I would rather suffer a hundred deaths than live the last six weeks over again.'

The meeting took place about 600 yards from the cantonment, half-way between the river and Mahmood

Khan's fort. Captain Mackenzie led forward an Arab horse which Macnaghten wished to present to Akbar Khan, and the latter accepted it with a suitable speech of thanks. He then suggested that both parties should dismount, and Macnaghten did so, followed by his staff, and they reclined on some horse blankets which the servants had spread out on the snow. By now a great crowd of Afghans had appeared in the background, and was steadily edging forward. When Mackenzie and Lawrence protested that a secret conference could not be conducted before an audience the chiefs who had accompanied Akbar Khan lashed out with their whips and the crowd retired a little. Akbar Khan then asked: 'Are you ready to carry out the proposals we have agreed?' to which Macnaghten replied: 'Why not?' With this, Macnaghten and his officers were seized from behind and their weapons snatched from them. The three captains were then forcibly seated on horseback behind Afghan riders, who began galloping through the milling crowds which attacked them with knives and screamed for the death of the infidels. Trevor slipped from his seat and was immediately hacked to pieces, but the other two reached the cantonment unhurt. Meanwhile Macnaghten had been knocked to the ground by Akbar Khan and for some time they were locked in combat. Macnaghten cried out: 'Az barae Khoda!' (For God's sake!), then Akbar Khan drew a pistol and shot him. Whether he died immediately is not known, but the Afghans closed in and attacked his prostrate body with their knives. Dost Mohammed's son had taken his revenge—ironically with one of the pistols Macnaghten had given him a few days earlier.

On the 6th January 1842 the army began its retreat from Kabul. Major Eldred Pottinger had been asked to assume the role of Political Agent and Adviser, and he had lost no time in negotiating terms for the evacuation. These were signed on the 30th December by eighteen chiefs, and provided for a safe conduct to the border. No one had any faith that the Afghans would observe the agreement; no one had faith in anything, but it was a

question of marching or starving. There were left now 4,500 troops, an immense amount of baggage and stores, some hundreds of sick and wounded, a large party of women and children, and 12,000 panic-stricken followers. Deep snow covered every inch of the mountain and plain, and the cold was so great that it penetrated even the warmest clothing. A cut had been made through the eastern rampart and through this streamed the melancholy column of troops, gun-wagons, carts, camels, and horses. The advance guard was led by the 44th Foot and included some sappers and a squadron of Irregular Horse. It was commanded by Brigadier Anquetil. In the main column, commanded by Shelton, came two regiments of Native Infantry, Anderson's Irregular Horse, a detachment of the Horse Artillery with two guns, and the women and children with their escort. In the rearguard, under Colonel Chambers, came two regiments of Native Infantry (including the Shah's 6th), the 5th Light Cavalry, and the remainder of the Horse Artillery with four guns. At 10 a.m. a message had been received from Nawab Jabar Khan requesting Elphinstone to delay his departure for another day as the Afghan escort had not arrived, but already the head of the column was in motion and any cancellation of orders would have quickly led to chaos. Also, the northern sector of the cantonment was already filling with a large crowd of Afghans which had swept down from Bamaru; they were rushing in and out of the huts, looting everything they could lay their hands on. It was evening before the main body had finished filing out on to the plain, and dark before the rearguard got on the move. Their first night was spent only a short distance from the camp; many people were shot by exultant Afghans who let off their jezails from the ramparts.

Shah Shuja had watched the retreat all day from a room in the Bala Hissar; he knew that not only the army was doomed, but himself.

All night the cantonment blazed, and the leaping flames could be seen miles off by the troops bivouacking on the plain. They could not hear the fanatical shrieks of

the Afghans, but these went on all night also.

On the morning of the 7th January the column moved off in the reverse order—'if that could be called *order*', writes Vincent Eyre, 'which consisted of a mingled mob of soldiers, camp-followers, and baggage cattle, preserving not even the faintest semblance of that regularity and discipline on which depended our only chance of escape from the dangers which threatened us'. Many of the men when called to get up at first light had not responded; they had been frozen to death in the snow. One reason for the chaos was that the followers had not waited for any orders, but had folded their tents and moved off at first light. According to Lady Sale, the troops merely followed suit, no orders being given and no bugles sounding. Some of the sepoys had already gone off with the followers, and when asked to explain themselves, replied, 'I have a lame foot . . .' 'I can't find my regiment', or 'I've lost my musket'. Demoralisation could go little further.

To add to the discomfiture of the army, the Afghan looters had moved out from Kabul, and found their way into the camp even before the column had abandoned it. Other Afghans were more hostile still, and, as the three-pounder mountain guns were dragged past a small fort, a party of horsemen dashed out and captured them. Other parties moved on either flank of the column as it wound slowly across the plain. Elphinstone comforted himself at first by asserting that they were the escort provided under the agreement of the 30th, but he was soon disillusioned. Some time before noon the Afghans set upon the rear-guard who had to bring their guns into action and keep up a steady fire to hold them off. Even then Brigadier Anquetil had to send for reinforcements, and, in the growing confusion, the Afghans were able to swoop down on the middle of the column and capture a good deal of baggage.

The column had left Kabul with five and a half days' rations to last till Jalalabad, and so it was necessary to press on as fast as possible. But when Elphinstone and the head of the column reached Butkhak a message

arrived stating that if he advanced any further the rear-guard would be destroyed. He therefore had no alternative but to halt and send back what troops and guns he could spare to help them. So on the 7th the column moved a bare five and a half miles. Watching it closely was Akbar Khan, and Captain Skinner, learning this, galloped across to see him. Akbar Khan argued that the column had been attacked because it marched before the Afghan chiefs were ready; however, he added, if it would halt where it was for the night he would provide food, forage, and firewood. For this service he required six hostages to ensure that the retreat did not continue beyond Tizin before General Sale had evacuated Jalalabad. These terms were agreed, and the firing having stopped, camp was made at the entrance to the Khurd-Kabul Pass.

Thing were even more chaotic that night than they had been on the 6th. Lady Sale wrote in her journal: 'Again no ground was marked out for the troops. Three fourths of the sepoys are mixed up with the camp-followers, and know not where to find the headquarters of their corps. Snow lies a foot deep on the ground. No food for man or beast; and even water from the river close at hand difficult to obtain as our people were fired on in fetching it.' Hands and feet were so frozen that hundreds of men were put out of action. The cavalry had to be lifted on to their horses. And the snow was packed so hard into the horses' hoofs that a hammer and chisel was needed to cut it off. So many tents had now been lost that those who could find room in one at all were crammed to suffocation; Lady Sale shared a small tent with eight others. By morning, according to Eyre's calculations, only a few hundred troops were fit for duty.

At first light the Afghans began firing on the camp, and it was only when Major Thain put himself at the head of the 44th Foot and led an attack that they made off. Captain Skinner, seeing what was happening, galloped across to Akbar Khan to protest. Akbar Khan's reply was a further demand for hostages. So Major

Pottinger, Lawrence, and Mackenzie were handed over. The firing then ceased again.

It was midday before the column moved on. At the entrance to the Khurd-Kabul Pass, says Eyre, 'an attempt was made to separate the troops from the non-combatants, which was but partially successful, and created considerable delay. . . . The idea of threading the stupendous pass, in the face of an armed tribe of blood-thirsty barbarians, with such a dense irregular multitude, was frightful. . . .' He did not exaggerate; the pass is five miles long, and shut in by precipitous hills. Down the centre of it rushes a mountain stream which the narrow path keeps crossing. Unfortunately the stream wasn't frozen, though sheets of ice and snow covered the banks, making the passage of men, and especially of animals, slow and treacherous. As the defile narrowed the hostile tribesmen¹ could be seen massing on the heights, and soon a hot fire came down. Some of Akbar Khan's attendants tried to restrain the tribesmen, but without success, and before long horses, camels, men and women lay dead or writhing in agony on the snow. Lady Sale and her party, who were mounted on horseback, galloped forward and most of them escaped. The ladies riding on camels were not so fortunate, and, as their beasts sank down dying, had to abandon them and their baggage to try to find lifts elsewhere. Mrs. Mainwaring was carrying her baby in her arms but still did not give up. 'She had to walk a considerable distance . . . through deep snow,' wrote Lady Sale, 'and also had to pick her way over the dead, dying, and wounded, both men and cattle, and constantly to cross the streams of water, wet up to the knees, pushed and shoved about by men and animals, the enemy keeping up a sharp fire, and several people killed close to her. She, however, got safe to camp with her child. . . .'

The camp that night had little comfort to offer. 'We had ascended to a still colder climate than we had left behind,' writes Vincent Eyre, 'and were without tents,

¹ Contemporary accounts refer to 'Ghazis', i.e. fanatics. They probably came from several tribes.

fuel, or food: the snow was the only bed for all, and for many, ere morning, it proved the winding-sheet. It is only marvellous that any should have survived that fearful night.' Even after dark, wounded were streaming in, moaning and whimpering and trying to find shelter, but there was no shelter to be had, no food, no drink; and most of them lay down in the snow to die. Lady Sale lay on a bank with her daughter and son-in-law, Lieutenant Sturt, and someone kindly threw them some blankets. She says: 'Dr. Bryce of the Horse Artillery came round and examined Sturt's wound. He dressed it: but I saw by the expression of his countenance that there was no hope. He afterwards kindly cut the ball out of my wrist and dressed both my wounds.' Later on that night some tenting was found, into which the three of them moved, Sturt suffering terribly from his wound. When Lady Sale looked out of the tent next morning she found it surrounded by dead men.

On the 9th Elphinstone intended to commence marching at 10 a.m., but the troops were already on the move by eight, anxious to escape from the vile pass. However, a message arrived from Akbar Khan advising the General to call the men back, as he had not yet made arrangements to escort the column. Both officers and men wanted to ignore this message, declaring that, if they were to survive, their only chance was now to get on as swiftly as possible. But Elphinstone wouldn't have it, and the men were brought back. This action so enraged many of the sepoys that they promptly announced their intention to desert.

While the column was halted, Lieutenant Sturt died of his wounds. Lady Sale and her daughter saw to it that he was buried in the snow, and she adds simply: 'We had the sorrowful satisfaction of giving him a Christian burial.'

Towards noon Captain Skinner arrived back in camp with a suggestion from Akbar Khan 'that all the widowed ladies and married families ... should at once be made over to his protection, to preserve them from further hard-

ships'. He promised to escort them personally, one day's march in the rear of the column. Elphinstone was for rejecting the offer, but Skinner was able to persuade him, and so the party moved off, with Captain Troup, the brigade-major of the Shah's forces, who had been wounded, and were taken to the Khurd-Kabul fort where rooms were allotted to them. Lady Sale records that: 'At midnight some mutton bones and greasy rice were brought to us. . . . All that Mrs. Sturt and I possess are the clothes on our backs in which we quitted Kabul.' Not all the party reached the safety of the fort; a child was brought in covered with his mother's blood, having been rescued from some tribesmen who were taking him up to the hills. The mother was never seen again.

In the afternoon Elphinstone ordered the troops to parade, as a party of Afghan horsemen were seen mustering for the attack. The 44th Foot mustered 200 men, and the native infantry regiments about 120 each; the cavalry were even weaker, the Irregular Horse being down to 100 and the 5th Light Cavalry down to seventy. The attack did not materialise, but neither did the food and fuel promised by Akbar Khan, so more men died in the night.

On the tenth the column plunged on again, with the camp-followers crowding the route ahead. The native troops had now lost all discipline, few could fire their muskets and a good many had thrown them away. 'Hope,' says Eyre, 'seemed to have died in every breast.' But to their eternal credit the 44th somehow held together, and with the remaining Horse Artillery guns provided the advance guard. Before long the Afghans were seen occupying a position high on the right, and as the column came into range poured down a devastating fire on to it. Writes Eyre: 'Fresh numbers fell with every volley, and the gorge was soon choked with the dead and the dying; the unfortunate sepoy, seeing no means of escape and driven to utter desperation, cast away their arms and accoutrements, which only clogged their movements . . . and along with the camp-followers, fled for their lives.' This was the moment the Afghans had been

waiting for, and, drawing their swords, they rushed down on the luckless sepoy and slaughtered them. The last remnants of the Native Infantry ceased to exist, and the treasure chest together with all the baggage, was carried away in triumph. While this was happening, the forward elements of the column had reached Khak-i-Jabar, about five miles ahead, without further opposition, and here they decided to halt to let the rest catch up. But all that arrived was a few stragglers bringing news of the massacre. Aghast, the men looked at each other while the truth slowly dawned on them: that the main body and the rearguard had been cut off and destroyed. They themselves were the only survivors. The 44th Foot were now down to 140 men, the Horse Artillery fifty, and one twelve-pounder gun, and the cavalry 150 men. There was also a large body of camp-followers still surviving.

As usual that evening, Captain Skinner rode off to liaise with Akbar Khan, and carried a message from Elphinstone, protesting at the attack on his column, despite the promise of safe conduct. In reply Akbar Khan regretted the slaughter, but said that the tribesmen were now so elated as to be beyond the control of their own chiefs. As a last resource he suggested that the troops still left should lay down their arms and place themselves under his protection, after which he would assure their escort to Jalalabad. The camp-followers, he added, must be left to their fate. Elphinstone had no option but to decline, and so the following day the march went on.

The road lay downhill for about five miles and led into a narrow defile. Here, to their horror, the troops stumbled across the dead bodies of the followers who had gone ahead of them; they were lying in heaps, shot, cut down with swords, and mutilated. Among them were some British officers who, having been wounded earlier on, were travelling with the followers. They had been slaughtered too. The defile was about three miles long and covered by the fanatical tribesmen, who poured down a destructive fire from the heights. The column, however, had no alternative but to plunge on, leaving its

dead where they lay, and succouring the wounded as best it could. Shelton rose to great heights of courage this day, commanding the rearguard. In Eyre's view he saved the entire column from being massacred. By 4 p.m., when it reached Tizin, Eyre estimated that 12,000 men, including camp-followers, had been lost since Kabul. And the column wasn't yet half-way to Jalalabad.

Elphinstone tried again to negotiate with Akbar Khan, but Skinner came back with the same proposals as the night before: that the followers should be abandoned, and the troops should hand over their arms and place themselves under his protection. These were still considered unacceptable, and after a conference of the senior officers it was decided that a night march should be attempted with the object of reaching Jagdalak, a distance of twenty-two miles, by the early hours of the following day. There was a short cut over the hills, which it was thought should be passable. As a ruse, Akbar Khan was informed that the column only intended to move to Seh Baba, and at 7 p.m. the march began. It was now bitterly cold and the climb was exhausting; some men, including Dr. Duff, the superintendent surgeon of the force, collapsed and lay down to die. Mercifully the column wasn't fired on till it reached Barik-ab, when a few random shots were heard. These, however, caused immediate panic among the followers, who charged through the 44th Foot, acting as the advance guard, and chaos ensued. Herded in the defile, they blocked the way ahead, and some hours were lost in the darkness before the troops could sort themselves out and push on to Katter-Sang, where they waited for the rest of the column to catch up. It succeeded in doing so, but not until 8 a.m., which was far too late. There were still ten miles to go before Jagdalak, and the tribesmen were already crowding the surrounding heights. The delay caused by the stampeding followers had, in fact, robbed the retreating column of its last chance of escape. But still, doomed and withering, it staggered on, mile after mile, beneath a hail of bullets. Brigadier Shelton still commanded the rear-

guard, still by some miracle of courage and determination kept it in being, and held off overwhelming hordes of tribesmen.

About 3 p.m. what was left of the column reached Jagdalak, and took up a position behind some ruined walls crowning a hillock by the roadside. To give heart to their men, the officers took up a forward position in line, and led the cheers for Shelton and his men as they struggled up the last yards of the slope, still under fire. Following the column, the Afghans moved up to the hills dominating Jagdalak, and continued to bring down fire. The walls gave some protection from this, but men were still being hit. To quote Eyre again: 'The exhausted troops and followers now began to suffer greatly from thirst, which they were unable to satisfy. A tempting stream trickled near the foot of the hill, but to venture down to it was certain death. Some snow that covered the ground was eagerly devoured, but increased, instead of alleviating their sufferings. The raw flesh of three bullocks which had been fortunately saved, was served out to the soldiers, and ravenously swallowed.' But the firing down from the tribesmen grew steadily worse, and the followers in their panic rushed about blindly looking for shelter. The chaos was so great that Captain Bygrave and fifteen British troops decided to storm the tribesmen's positions if they died in the attempt. Seeing them charge, the tribesmen retreated, but no sooner had Bygrave gone back to the main position than they returned and resumed their firing.

At 5 p.m. Captain Skinner arrived with a message from Akbar Khan. This requested Elphinstone's presence at a conference, and demanded that Brigadier Shelton and Captain Johnson should be handed over as hostages for the evacuation of Jalalabad. Elphinstone, seeing no alternative, handed over temporary command to Brigadier Anquetil, and went off with Skinner and the two officers. Witnessing his departure, the troops lost any last shreds of hope; in their view the Afghan treachery was so great that negotiation only led the way to more slaughter.

However, Elphinstone and the other officers were courteously received by Akbar Khan, and given food and drink. Akbar Khan also promised to send supplies to the troops.

On the 12th January the tribal chiefs arrived at Akbar Khan's headquarters and at 9 a.m. a meeting was held. At this the chiefs screamed their hatred of the British, and threw off Akbar Khan's efforts at meditation. Only the suggestion that 20,000 rupees should be handed over appeased them to any degree whatsoever; and even then nothing was agreed on. In the afternoon Elphinstone protested at being separated from his troops any longer (if only he had shown some of this resolution at Kabul!) and demanded that he be allowed to return. At 7 p.m., however, firing broke out at Jagdalak, and it was learned that the troops, impatient and probably not believing that the General would return anyway, had decided to push on.

The suspense had, of course, been considerable. The tribesmen were mustering on the hills all around and at any moment might launch an attack. Trying to ascertain what was happening at Akbar Khan's headquarters, Major Thain and Captain Skinner rode out towards it, but were stopped by a tribesman, who rushed up to Skinner and shot him in the face. He lingered on in great pain till 3 p.m. when he died. By now the tribesmen had begun firing again from the heights, and Thain, Bygrave, and other officers took up parties of men to drive them off; but each time they came back again and the murderous fire was resumed.

No one gave the order to advance, but when night came down and there was still no word from Elphinstone, men got to their feet and headed along the path towards Jagdalak. The sick and wounded had to be abandoned and left to their fate. The road led down into the valley, and for a mile and a half the column pushed on down the bed of a stream, through a desultory fire. But then the hills closed in to a formidable defile some two miles long, and the road led upwards towards the kotal, or head of the pass. Here it was blocked by a barrier which had been

set up, consisting of the prickly branches of what Eyre describes as 'holly-oak'; this took some time to remove, and meanwhile the tribesmen collected in force. From now on a withering fire was poured down at close quarters and the massacre was even worse than at Tanga Tariki. Then the tribesmen charged furiously downhill and set on the milling mass of troops and followers. Only a pitiful remnant managed to force a way through the barrier, perhaps forty men all told. Twelve officers, including Brigadier Anquetil, were killed. There was no pretence at organisation or command now; the small bands of survivors, mostly cavalry and mounted officers, pushed on for dear life. Luckily for them the tribesmen were so busy plundering the dead that they marched unmolested. Then the country opened out and the going became easier. But there were still other obstacles ahead. The tribesmen were guarding the only bridge over the Surkab river, and when a subaltern of the 44th led a party to storm it, he was killed with a number of his men.

As the sun came up on the 13th, the survivors of the Kabul force were approaching Gandamak, twenty-nine miles from Jalalabad. Only twenty men were still capable of bearing arms. Leaving the road, which was blocked by gathering forces of Ghazis, they took up a defensive position on a hill to the left, determined to sell their lives dearly. Some time during the morning a party of Afghan horsemen approached, and Major Griffiths, the senior officer now surviving, entered into negotiations with them for a safe conduct to Jalalabad. A crowd of Afghans now gathered round. At first they seemed friendly, but as they made attempts to snatch the men's arms, firing broke out and the negotiations were broken off. According to Eyre: 'The enemy, taking up their post on an opposite hill, marked off man after man, officer after officer, with unerring aim. Parties of Afghans rushed up at intervals to complete the work of extermination, but were as often driven back by the still dauntless handful of invincibles. At length, nearly all being wounded more or less, a final

onset on the enemy sword in hand terminated the unequal struggle.... Major Griffiths and Mr. Blewitt had been previously led off to a neighbouring fort, and were thus saved. Of those whom they left behind, Captain Soutar alone with three or four privates were spared, and carried off captive....' A few officers and men who were mounted had ridden off towards Fatehabad after bursting through the barrier, and six of them, Captains Bellew, Collier, and Hopkins, Lieutenant Bird, Dr. Harpur, and Dr. Brydon, reached the village. Here some peasants brought them food, and they unwisely delayed to eat it; suddenly a party of tribesmen appeared and attacked them. Bellew and Bird were cut down immediately, but the other four managed to scramble on to their horses and galloped off, still pursued by the tribesmen.

On the afternoon of the 13th, when the garrison at Jalalabad were busy at work improving their defences, their arms piled and their equipment close at hand, a sentry on the ramparts happened to look up and saw a solitary horseman struggling towards the fort. Word was passed to the officers, who brought out their field-glasses and watched the figure moving slowly towards them. Both the horse and the man were obviously in the last stages of exhaustion, the horse stumbling and swaying and the man slumped forward on its neck. Writes Sir John Kaye: 'A shudder ran through the garrison. That solitary horseman looked like a messenger of death. Few doubted that he was the bearer of intelligence that would fill their souls with horror and dismay.... A part of the cavalry were sent out to succour him, and brought him in wounded, exhausted, half-dead. The messenger was Dr. Brydon, and he now reported his belief that he was the sole survivor of some sixteen thousand men.'

In fact he was not the sole survivor; Elphinstone, Shelton, Pottinger, Eyre, and the other hostages survived, as did Lady Sale and most of the women who were led into captivity, though their sufferings were great, and it was many months before they were rescued. Nevertheless,

the destruction of the Kabul army was complete. This was an event unique in British military history; and indeed to find a parallel one must go back to Caesar's commentaries and the destruction of General Sabinus and his army by the Gauls. Needless to add, the characters of Sabinus and Elphinstone were almost identical.

When Lord Auckland received news of these disasters he pronounced them to be 'inexplicable as they are appalling'. Pressed by Sir Jasper Nicholls, he assembled a small force at Peshawar under Brigadier Wilde, but that was about all. Not until Lord Ellenborough arrived in India on the 28th February and took over as Governor-General was any major action taken. Then General Pollock was put in command of a force of 8,000 men, and on the 5th April he forced the Khyber Pass and advanced on Jalalabad. He still lacked the orders he wanted—to revenge the defeat of the Kabul army—and arriving at Jalalabad, he found that Sale and the garrison there were holding out with little trouble, and had indeed defeated the Afghans in a pitched battle outside the city.

While Pollock was still in the Khyber, Shah Shuja was murdered in Kabul; the last relic of Auckland's policy had perished.

It was during these operations that the British obtained their first look at the Khyber and realised what a formidable obstacle it was. Eight miles to the west of Peshawar lay the old Sikh fort of Jamrud, and four miles beyond this was the eastern mouth of the pass. From Jamrud to Torkham at the other end was no less than fifty miles—and every inch of the way covered by strong fire positions. In the bottom of the gorge ran a torrent which the steep path was not always successful in avoiding. Twenty-five miles in there was the fortress of Ali Masjid, perched on a rocky knoll, and beyond this the gorge narrowed and continued beneath great overhanging rocks. Seven miles further in came Landi Kotal, which stood at 3,509 feet, the highest point on the pass, and here there were terraced fields and villages with their watch-towers. From now on the descent was even worse

than the climb, and the journey to Landi Khana was like going down into a pit. Beyond, as the road flattened out, was a small horseshoe valley, with the village of Bagh set among terraced trees, and then came Torkham and the western mouth of the pass. No one, not even a large force, could enter the Khyber without trepidation; and the Afridis and Shinwaris, perched high on the observation posts, made it quite clear that no intruders were welcome.

There was now a lull while Ellenborough issued stirring but vague proclamations and Pollock waited for orders. On the 4th July General Nott (who was still holding out at Kandahar) received a letter from Ellenborough stating that he must withdraw to India *but could go via Kabul if he wished*. This was the loophole the soldiers wanted. Nott immediately got in touch with Pollock, and it was agreed that Nott would march on Kabul, while Pollock marched north to support him. On the 9th Nott commenced his march, and by the 30th had entered Ghazni. Seven weeks later, on the 17th September, after defeating strong forces of Ghilzais, he arrived at Kabul to find the Union Jack flying from the flagmast on the Bala Hissar. General Pollock had arrived two days earlier, having fought and won a major battle against the Ghilzais and other Afghans.

'The sight of Kabul,' says General MacMunn, 'was a magnificent one.... The British Army now camped in the valleys was now far larger than the Afghans had yet seen.... Streets of tents as far as the eye could see, and masses of men in scarlet coats and black shakos paraded and marched in every direction. Brass helmets flashed in the sun, guns peered from every corner of vantage.' This was a very different army with a very different commander from the one which had retreated ignominiously the year before. Pollock had no envoys or political officers to bedevil him; by the wise decision of Lord Ellenborough he was in supreme command and could act swiftly. The Afghan chiefs were understandably apprehensive.

But in the event no massive retaliation was attempted. The Afghans had already been defeated decisively in the field, the Kohistani towns of Istalif and Charikar had been razed by a punitive expedition led by General Sale, and numerous private acts of vengeance had been carried out. The only public punishment, so far as Kabul was concerned, was the destruction of the Grand Bazaar, the Chahar Chauk, through which the mutilated body of Sir William Macnaghten had been dragged and exposed to insult. The job was carried out by the sappers, after giving the population due notice.

In an effort to lay the foundations of a new regime, Pollock arranged for Shah Fath Jang, a member of the royal house, to be crowned as king; but the expedient did not prove successful. When the time came for the army to leave he pleaded to go with it.

The march back began on the 12th October. Pollock understood the art of mountain warfare, and knew that you could not move through valleys unless you secured pickets on the hills. His force therefore went through unmolested. Nott, however, had still not learned this elementary lesson, so lost some men and baggage. However, the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief were awaiting the victorious army in Ferozepore—where Lord Auckland and Ranjit Singh had reviewed the Army of the Indus four years previously. Triumphal arches had been erected, a temporary bridge had been thrown across the Sutlej, and the ceremonial elephants were led out in their gorgeous trappings. On the 17th December Sir Robert Sale crossed the bridge at the head of his troops, as the crowds cheered and the guns boomed forth their salute. Only the elephants cast a gloom over the proceedings by refusing to salaam with their trunks as rehearsed. However, the band of the Lancers struck up with 'See the Conquering Heroes Come' and all was well. A week later General Pollock arrived with his forces, and on the 23rd General Nott. 'Then,' says Sir John Kaye, 'there was feasting and festivity in the gigantic tents, hung with silken flags, on which in polyglot emblazonments,

were the names of the actions which had been fought.' The celebrations went on till the end of the year and finished up with a great parade of 40,000 men and a hundred guns, under the command of Sir Jasper Nicholls. 'On this grand tableau the curtain fell; and the year opportunely closed in gaiety and glitter, in prosperity and parade.'

But the situation was—if anyone paused to think among the junketings—that the British were back on the Sutlej, in the base from which they had marched in 1839. Russia was still advancing. And, with the death of Ranjit Singh, the North-West Frontier lay open and exposed.

On the 1st October 1842 Lord Ellenborough was working in Simla, in the room where four years earlier Lord Auckland had drafted the proclamation precipitating the First Afghan War. Ellenborough was about to issue a proclamation too, but very different in content and tone. 'The Government of India,' he declared, 'directed its army to pass the Indus in order to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests, and to replace upon his throne a sovereign represented to be friendly to those interests, and popular with his former subjects. . . . Disasters unparalleled in their extent unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery by which they were completed, have, in one short campaign, been avenged upon every scene of past misfortune. . . . The British arms now in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej. The Governor-General will leave it to the Afghans themselves to create a government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes.'

When Auckland read these words in London he was naturally incensed. 'The proclamation is an uncandid and wild document and I am nettled by it,' he wrote Palmerston. When Ellenborough arrived in India 'he found every man who could be spared . . . advancing upon the field of action. With these means success has been achieved, and he might have had the generosity to

acknowledge the efficiency and singleness of purpose with which I gave him aid.' Justifying the dilatoriness after news of the Kabul disaster had arrived, Auckland continued: 'It was plainly my duty to give strength to my successor and to leave to him the election of advance or retreat.' (This, of course, is nonsense. His duty lay with the troops, who were paying with their lives for his absurd policy.) Answering Ellenborough's first point, that the army was sent across the Indus 'to expel from Afghanistan a chief believed to be hostile to British interests...' Auckland asserts that it was *not* sent for that reason—'The object was to repel the advance of the Persian Army under Russian encouragement....' This statement is quite inaccurate: the Persians had retreated from Herat before the army marched. Also, Auckland in his own proclamation had stated that his object was to install on the throne of Afghanistan 'an ally who is interested in resisting aggression'. Before closing his letter to Palmerston, Auckland roundly asserted that: 'The primary objects of the expedition were gained, foreign aggression was repelled, and the promise yet remained of the establishment of British influence and the extension of British commerce throughout Central Asia.' The sole fault, he declared, lay with Elphinstone, whose 'feebleness of action' allowed a local disturbance to grow into an insurrection. Typically, he neglected to add that it was he, Auckland, who had insisted on appointing this effete soldier.

To what extent was Auckland personally to blame? To what extent was he endorsing a policy outlined by the Court of Directors, the Government, and especially by Palmerston? Sir John Hobhouse, Chairman of the East India Company, said in June 1842, 'Auckland must not bear the blame ... it was the policy of the Government.' When one reads this statement in conjunction with the Secret Dispatch of the Secret Committee, dated 24th October,² which gave instructions regarding the invasion of Afghanistan, it is difficult to dissuade oneself that

² See page 53.

Hobhouse was telling the truth. What is more obscure, however, is the role of Lord Palmerston; and it may not be without significance that the correspondence between him and Lord Auckland at the vital period is missing. But, from his general correspondence and dispatches at this period, it is quite evident that he was obsessed with the advance of Russia in Central Asia and the security of the North-Western Frontier of India. In a letter to the Duke of Wellington, for example, dated 22nd May 1838, he was writing: 'It would not be provident to dispatch a very large force to the Indus without forming a large reserve up on the Frontier.' But at the same time there can be no doubt that Auckland was hankering after some major achievement, some great victory which would crown his period in India and be for ever associated with his name. Headquarters take their tone from their chiefs, and the hysterical delight which broke out in Simla at news from Afghanistan is not insignificant. Whether or not the policy was Auckland's, he embraced it wholeheartedly; he rose with it and fell with it.

The North-West Frontier first came to the notice of Parliament in February 1840 when Viscount Melbourne moved a vote of thanks to the Army of the Indus, after the occupation of Kabul. Members—whether approving of the campaign or not—agreed that the troops and their commanders 'deserved the gratitude of the House'. On the 8th February 1842 the Frontier was mentioned again in quite another context, when a member arose to ask whether any dispatches had been received concerning the newspaper accounts of 'the alleged insurrection in Kabul'. Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, replied that a dispatch had just arrived 'but I have not been able to inform myself of the contents'. A month later more questions were asked, but Peel stonewalled again, saying that his information was still indirect, and nothing had come from Kabul. In April, when members still persisted, he stated perfunctorily: '... the information received by the Government, except for the melancholy facts which are already before the public is exceedingly imperfect. The

causes which have led to such enormous loss of life are still imperfectly known.' In May he pleaded the public interest in withholding information and continued on this tack till news of Pollock's advance came through in the autumn. There was no major debate on the war until June 1843 when H. J. Baillie moved that the whole correspondence leading up to it be produced. In the course of a long speech he castigated those responsible for the war. 'The resources of our Indian Empire are being wasted,' he said, 'in the vain attempt to subdue a race of men no less fierce and valiant, a country fitted ... by nature for defence, and so remote by its position as to render war on a large scale almost a hopeless undertaking.' The boundary of our Indian possessions, he urged, should lie on the Indus.

Baillie was supported by Disraeli, who pointed out that the East India Company was now claiming the cost of the war from the British Government. Developing his theme, he argued that the British would never lose India by internal insurrection or by foreign invasion. 'If ever we lost India it would be from financial convulsion. It would be lost by the pressure of circumstances, which events like the war in Afghanistan would bring about by exhausting the resources of the country.' As for Lord Auckland's talk of 'establishing a barrier' on the North-West Frontier, Disraeli argued with some wit that if the British only left it alone Afghanistan would constitute the finest barrier there could be. 'The soil is barren and unproductive. The country is intersected by stupendous mountains ... where an army must be exposed to absolute annihilation. The people are proverbially faithless. ... Here then are all the elements combined that can render the country absolutely impassable as a barrier, if we abstain from interference.'

Replying, Sir Robert Peel argued that the question before the House was whether the papers should be produced; and his view was that they should not. Palmerston immediately arose to support him, on the grounds that British relations with Russia were now cordial, and it

would be inexpedient to open old wounds. As regards Auckland's policy, he stated that 'all persons who were qualified to form a sound opinion thought that immediate measures were necessary, with a view to securing Afghanistan for British interests'. The authority he quoted at great length, and appeared to rely on, was the late Sir Alexander Burnes.

Needless to add, the debate was fruitless, and the papers were not produced. It later transpired that the correspondence forwarded by Auckland for the perusal of the Government had been deliberately cut and edited to give a false impression. This piece of deceit stands to Auckland's eternal discredit, but by the time it was discovered he had been dead many years. The entire correspondence was not published until 1859.

In January 1834 a horseman rode out of the gates of Lahore and headed north for the Indus. This was Dost Mohammed, who, with the blessing of the British, was now on his way to Kabul to ascend the throne of Afghanistan for the second time. His mood was determined rather than triumphant; his country was torn and disaffected, and the situation on the North-West Frontier was still dark and uncertain.

FOUR

ONE FLAG: ONE FRONTIER

DESPITE his faults Lord Auckland had not been unlikeable as a man; his successor, Lord Ellenborough, was almost repulsive. Vain and pompous, he was also irascible and domineering. He had no respect for the opinions of others, and the thought of being offered advice was anathema to him. He was a brilliant orator, however, and when making his great speeches came alive in a way that he did at no other time. Like so many of the mid-Victorians, he hankered after military glory, but there were two obstacles which barred him from achieving it: the first, his abhorrence of any risk, and second, the fact that he did not happen to be a soldier. In these circumstances his only hope was to find some kindred spirit among the generals, someone willing to embark on adventures, with a chance of success—and by good luck such a man had just arrived in Poona to take up an appointment on the staff. He was sixty years old, a veteran of the Peninsular Wars, and scarred by a dozen wounds; but the lust for conquest still burned in him as strongly as ever. His name was Charles Napier.

'Eventful as my life has been,' he had written in 1840, 'my present high position and the threatening state of the country render it probable that the short portion which is left to me of life may be the most eventful of the whole.' Considering at this time that he was merely commanding the Northern District of England, with half-starved miners for an enemy, this prophecy seemed somewhat rash, but it had always been Napier's policy to prepare for opportunities long before they arrived. He didn't

drink or over-eat and kept his body lean and hard. Though he was of medium height, his presence was commanding, and his beaked nose projected itself below a massive forehead towards whomever he was addressing. His sight had faded, and his eyes were obscured by small steel spectacles, but his gaze still remained penetrating. His hair, which he wore long and waving, in the mode of former days, combined with his white beard to give him the most extraordinary appearance, and most officers meeting him for the first time wondered what had hit them. His energy, his attack, his speed of action, still remained superb, and he would tolerate no dawdling among his subordinates. Being informed, while at Poona, that a regiment in his area was in a state of mutiny, he wrote to its commanding officer: 'I expect to hear that you have put down the mutiny within *two hours* after the receipt of this letter.' On the 3rd September 1842 he received orders to leave Poona to take command of Upper and Lower Sind, and, as he realised instinctively, this was the call he'd been waiting for; invisible bugles were sounding the 'advance'. 'Charles! Charles Napier!' he wrote excitedly in his journal, 'take heed of your ambition for military glory; you had scotched that snake, but this high command will, unless you are careful, give it all its vigour again. Get thee behind me, Satan!' But, as so often, Satan needed more than one bidding, and the second never came.

Sind straddles the last 300 miles or more of the Indus river before it reaches the Arabian Sea. No one in those days described it as a pleasant place to live in, and many soldiers declared its climate to be the worst in the world. The heat is frightful from early spring to late autumn, the thermometer frequently reaching 117 degrees in the shade, and temperatures of 124 degrees are far from unknown. The eastern regions lie in the Great Indian Desert, where dust-storms blow up with amazing rapidity, and sand pillars go whirling across the wastes (the dreaded 'dancing dervishes'). The wind is like a blast from a furnace, and when the storms come they blot out

the sun with a curtain of sand, suffocating men, horses, and camels alike. Charles Napier was caught in one of these storms soon after his arrival, but miraculously survived to record his impressions. 'The air was calm, but suddenly everything animate and inanimate became overcharged with electricity, and the sand, rising violently, blinded the horses; the human hair stood out like quills, streaming with fire, and all felt a strange depression of mind, until the evil influence passed away.'

The population, which numbered about a million, was a mixture of Baluchis, Sindhis, Hindus of Punjabi origin, and Afghans. The dominant race was the Baluchis, and one of their tribes, the Talpuris, had conquered the whole country a century earlier. At the time of Napier's arrival it was divided into three states—Khairpur or Upper Sind, Hyderabad or Lower Sind, and Mirpur, each state being ruled by an amir, a descendant of the Talpuris. It is difficult to find anything good or even excusatory to say about these men; by the standards set by Ranjit Singh at Lahore, their courts were bestial and depraved. Their sole desires, so far as one can judge, were wealth and sensual indulgence, and the keeping of order they left to hordes of Baluchi horsemen, paid regularly and granted unlimited licence to plunder. The mass of the people, realising that they would be robbed by taxes if they managed to gain anything above mere subsistence, were apathetic. But their treatment of each other was just as barbarous as the treatment they received from their rulers; husbands often murdered their wives not only for adultery but for the mere suspicion of it.

'We have no right to seize Sind,' Napier wrote after packing his bags for the journey to Karachi, 'yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, humane, and useful piece of rascality it will be.' Still the proprieties had to be observed, evidence of treachery had to be discovered, and the whole affair stage-managed to make it look inevitable. Awaiting Napier at Karachi was a letter from Ellenborough stating his determination that any amir who had recently shown hostile designs against the British

Government should be punished, once evidence of guilt had been established. Napier, however, no fool when it came to assessing risks, put things rather differently, informing his staff that the principal object of the exercise was not to secure a buttress for the British Empire but to rescue the people from an effete despotism. 'My object,' he declared with facile imagery, 'is to resuscitate the goose; but while doing so the Amirs may go by the board: if so, it is their own fault. Did God give a whole people to half a dozen men to torment?' Soon documentary evidence of treachery was forthcoming; Nasir Khan of Hyderabad had written to a chief called Bibrak, Rustam of Khairpur to the Maharaja of Multan.... There is no need to dwell on further details; a good deal of the documents were suspect, and some were plain forgeries, but they would serve. The amirs, realising what was in the wind, became restless, and, when Napier began intimating that an even harsher treaty was being drafted, mustered their Baluchi horsemen. Napier, of course, had no trouble in persuading himself that these defensive actions were the prelude to an attack, and declared with some heat: 'My mind is made up. If they fire a single shot, Sind will be annexed to India.' Vainly Colonel Outram¹ tried to plead with him, only to be lashed for his pains by Napier's tongue. 'You provoke me, Outram,' the old man cried, 'you pity those atrocious rascals!' By the end of November the draft treaty was with the amirs, who, though having no intention of signing, continued parleying week after week. If only they could delay matters until the hot season arrived, so they believed, Napier could not take the field with his force. But Napier refused to be sold a dummy. On the 8th December he issued a proclamation stating that, in accordance with the treaty, the country from Sabzalkot to Rohri was to be given up, and further negotiations followed, during which the amirs mustered every available horseman. But Napier was not impressed. 'I laugh at your preparations for war,' he scoffed, 'I must have your acceptance of the

¹ The Resident, i.e. the Governor-General's representative.

treaty immediately—yea or nay.’ No acceptance came, so on the 15th December Napier marched his troops across the Indus to occupy Sabzalkot and Bhung Bhara. Things were going his way; the war clouds were gathering nicely. But seated outside his tent at Rohri, and watching the lines of flickering camp-fires, he suddenly became seized by feelings of guilt. ‘My god!’ he wrote, ‘how humbled I feel when I think! How I exult when I behold! I have worked my way to this great command, and am gratified at having it, yet despise myself for being so gratified.... I despise my worldliness. Am I not past sixty? A few years must kill me; a few days may! And yet I am so weak as to care for these things! ... the weakness of man and the pride of war are too powerful for me....’

But the weeks went by; the amirs kept on arguing; and somehow the war wouldn’t come to the boil. With the approach of the hot weather, Napier realised that he could still be robbed, that the cup of glory could still be snatched from his lips. But then on the 12th February he had a slice of luck. A party of horsemen were surprised near his camp at Sakranda, and their leader was found to be in possession of a letter from one of the amirs of Hyderabad. This directed him to summon every man capable of wielding a sword and muster on the 9th at Miani, some ten miles north of Hyderabad. Now, as Napier was quick to observe, this letter bore the same date as a letter he had received from the amirs, begging him to delay his own advance till the 9th. This, he had no difficulty in persuading himself, was complete evidence of treachery, of the amirs’ firm intention to attack him; and his first duty now was to his army. If it stayed where it was, so he reasoned, it would be destroyed. Therefore he must march; there was no alternative. In a mood of great exultation he wrote to Outram (who was still behaving in a most unsoldierlike manner, trying to keep the peace): ‘I shall march tomorrow ... and attack every body of armed men I meet.... The troops have Lord Ellenborough’s order on their side, and I have delayed ... till not the eleventh, but the twelfth hour. If

men die in consequence of my delay, their blood may be justly charged to my account. . . . I am as sure of victory as a man who knows that victory is an accident can be.'

Even as he wrote, violence erupted in Hyderabad. Eight thousand Baluchis, led by two amirs, attacked the Residency, but it held out four hours under the leadership of Colonel Outram, who, having decided to unsheathe the sword, wielded it to some effect. Finally, however, numbers told, and he and his men were glad to escape up the Indus in two armed steamers. Some days later he reached Napier's camp, though unfortunately the General's comments on this occasion are not recorded. By the 17th February the small force totalling 2,600 men was in motion and marching south towards Hyderabad. Captain John Jacob, the leader of the Sind Horse, had come back the previous day reporting that the Baluchi army, numbering 20,000 men, supported by fifteen guns, was drawn up in a strong position in the bed of the Fuleli river at a place called Miani. Though outnumbered at over seven to one, Napier did not hesitate, and advanced swiftly till he came within striking distance of the enemy.

The details of Napier's battles belong to another story; all that need be said here is that he defeated the amirs at Miani, and soon afterwards, on the 24th March, at Hyderabad. The campaign was virtually over.

After pursuing the routed enemy at the head of his cavalry, he declared, 'I have every reason to believe that not another shot will be fired in Sind.' It is also said—though historians dispute this—that he sent a signal to Ellenborough consisting of one word: 'Peccavi' or 'I have Sind'. Whatever the exact text of the signal, the result was the same, a week later he was appointed Governor of Sind. 'Oh! if I can do one good thing to serve these poor people,' he wrote on receipt of this news, 'where so much blood has been shed in accursed war, I shall be happy.' More typically he remarked later on, 'The great receipt for quieting a country is a good thrashing first and great kindness afterwards: the wildest chaps are

thus tamed.' With ferocious energy, he tore into the job of organising the country, collecting revenues, launching engineering projects, and administering justice. His notions of the latter came into immediate conflict with Sindian ideas of what was proper, and when a great chief was condemned for murder a deputation arrived in Napier's office, pleading, 'She was his wife and he was angry with her.' To this Napier replied, 'Well, I am angry with him, and I mean to hang him.' Later on when there were more wife-murders and therefore more executions he declared, 'I will kill two hundred unless they stop.' Napier's was essentially a military administration, backed by the sword, but it was very effective. Trouble in the remotest village soon brought a troop of cavalry thundering across the desert, and within six months the natives came to look on Napier as a great God, all-seeing, all-knowing, and multi-armed. He was feared, but he was also very much respected; and when the people saw that he was making no attempt to feather his own nest he even enjoyed a measure of popularity. More important still, working and soldiering in the heat for sixteen hours a day, Napier knew that he had fulfilled his destiny.

The morality or otherwise of the annexation of Sind has been argued for over a century now, and it need not be dealt with here. What is important for this narrative is that for the first time British administration was extended up to the North-West Frontier. The border of Sind lay contiguous with the wild unknown territories of Baluchistan, hidden behind the Hala mountains; and it was not long before the border tribes became restive. The Bugtis came down on so many raids that Napier decided that a campaign was necessary to teach them a lesson, and marched north with a force of 2,000 cavalry, 2,500 infantry, 2,000 irregular troops, nine howitzers, and a siege train. Having sent Captain John Jacob ahead to arrange with a neighbouring tribe, called the Marris, for the Bugtis' escape route to be blocked, Napier pushed into the hills with two columns, his plan being that one should head direct for the town of Pulaji, while the other

completed an encircling movement. Swiftly sensing what he was up to, the Bugtis pulled back, then began harrying his communications. Initially they had some success, and a supply column with 500 camels turned and bolted. Napier, however, received news that the chiefs were starving and wished to surrender, so sent a message giving his terms in forthright language: 'Let the khan lay down his arms and be prepared to emigrate with his followers to a district I will point out on the left bank of the Indus. . . . If he refuses, he shall be pursued to death.' To this the khan replied that he wished to surrender, but in fact he did nothing of the kind and launched another massive attack, which stung Napier into retaliation. Pushing his columns rapidly through the hills, he surrounded the khan and his chiefs at a natural fortress called Traki; but even here they would not accept his terms and fighting broke out again. Only after fifty-four days of energetic campaigning were the chiefs captured. The Bugtis, however, were annoyed rather than humiliated and resolved to cut loose again at the very first opportunity.

So the British began fighting on the North-West Frontier of India, and were to continue to do so for another hundred years. At the time of this first expedition, against the Bugtis, their slice of the Frontier extended for only 350 miles, the northern boundary of Sind. But to the north-east of Sind lay the Punjab, with a sector of the Frontier extending no less than 704 miles, from Hazara in the north to Dera Ghazi Khan in the south. And already events were in train which would bring the British to this sector also.

The event which ignited the powder-trail in the Punjab was the death of Ranjit Singh, which, as already noted, occurred on the 27th June 1839. The debauches at Ferozepore, in honour of Lord Auckland, had brought on a stroke, and since late May the ruler had lain supine and speechless, giving his orders by signs. European doctors called to the palace managed to effect a partial recovery, but with the onset of a fever he banished them and sum-

moned native doctors, astrologers, and yogis. These, under the leadership of Fakir Aziz-ud-din, went into prolonged consultations and argued the effectiveness of a wide range of treatments. The cure eventually selected was a majun or compound of pearls and precious stones, which was administered twice daily by the Fakir himself. Despite this, Ranjit remained lucid enough to convene a meeting of his sirdars, or principal officers, at which he nominated his elder son, Kharak Singh, as his successor, placing the tilaj or mark of royalty on his head. Raja Dhian Singh was appointed prime minister. After these formalities were over, the majun took effect, and Ranjit rapidly declined; no offerings to the gods, not even the scattering of a million pounds of sterling or the gift of 100 tons of cooking fat to religious institutions, could save him. Stretched out on a raised platform in the sight of his nobles, he died silently, and his body, after being bathed and embalmed, was dressed in magnificent robes and ornaments. Four of his ranis and seven slave-girls volunteered to be burned on the funeral pyre with him. in the hope of entering paradise, and their offer was accepted. The body was placed on a decorated bier, shaped like a ship and burnished with gold, and taken in procession towards the funeral pyre. For the first time in their lives the ranis came out of the harem unveiled, and followed the cortège barefoot, while around them swarmed the poor of the city, scrambling for the coins thrown by the sirdars. One of the ranis, who had not been able to distribute all her jewels, had them carried by a retainer, and handed them to the crowd as he walked along. Each rani was preceded by a servant, who walked backwards holding a mirror, so that she could ensure that her determination to be sacrificed left no mark on her face. After the ranis came the slave-girls, some of them barely fifteen years of age, but they too seemed indifferent to the terrible fate now awaiting them. Dr. John Honigberger, who watched this melancholy event, recorded that his own heart was pounding more than theirs. The funeral pile was constructed of sandalwood

and aloe, in the form of a square, and stood six feet high. When the bier had been rested some feet away the priests and gurus recited prayers, after which the body was lifted on to the pile by the sirdars. The ranis then climbed a ladder in order of seniority and lay down by the head of the corpse; the slave-girls, who followed, arranged themselves by the feet. Soon they were all covered with reed mats soaked in oil, after which more prayers were said, to which the ranis, understandably, made no response. Then a large mat was pulled over the whole pile, and on to this jars of oil were poured. As the crowd held its breath, Prince Kharak Singh stepped forward with a lighted torch and ignited the pile at each corner; the flames shot up twenty feet or more, consuming in a matter of seconds the body of Ranjit Singh, his four ranis, and his seven slave-girls. The wood took longer to burn and it was two days before the ashes of the dead could be removed. By then the new situation in the Punjab was already becoming apparent.

Though the story which follows does not properly belong to the Frontier, it cannot be altogether ignored, firstly because it created the circumstances in which the British reached the Punjab Frontier, and secondly because it brought to the fore many men who were to dominate the scene later on. Briefly, then, Kharak Singh succeeded to the throne, but was poisoned in 1840. On the way home from the funeral his son was killed by a falling archway. Till 1843, Sher Singh, the nominee of the Khalsa army, was head of the state until he was assassinated in September 1843. After this the young Maharaja, Dhulip Singh, ascended the throne, though the real power was wielded by his mother's lover, Lal Singh. But then the Khalsa grew restive and on the 17th November 1845 crossed the river Sutlej to attack the British, so beginning the first Sikh War. Ellenborough was unprepared and his commander-in-chief, Sir Hugh Gough, was one of the most incompetent officers ever put in command of troops. After some ludicrous failures,

however, he managed to achieve a victory at Sobraon, and the British Army marched into Lahore to dictate peace terms. By now a Waterloo veteran, Sir Henry Hardinge, had succeeded Ellenborough, and through his leniency the Punjab was not annexed. However, as the war had to be paid for and the Sikh treasury was empty, the state of Kashmir was annexed and then sold to a Rajput of vile and bestial habits, called Gulab Singh.

Though Hardinge was lenient he had no inclination to take undue risks, and laid down that all the main cities of the Sikh kingdom, including Peshawar, should be occupied by British troops. As Resident at Lahore he appointed Major Henry Lawrence, a gunnery officer who had shown considerable gifts for administration and under him worked a picked team, most of them remarkable men who were to become as famous as Lawrence himself: Harry Lumsden, Herbert Edwardes, John Nicholson, and Major Hodson. The Sikh Durbar was kept in being at Lahore, its nominal head being the Maharani Jindan, the mother of Ranjit Singh's eight-year-old son, Dhulip Singh. Lawrence aptly described her as 'a strange blend of the prostitute, the tigress, and Machiavelli's Prince', and her appetite for sexual adventure was equalled only by her cruelty and her passion for planning assassinations. Eventually she had to be incarcerated, but the political situation at Lahore still remained unstable.

In general, however, the Punjab settled down, and Henry Lawrence's men tore into their work with ferocious energy. In the summer of 1847 Harry Lumsden, who was then assisting Herbert Edwardes at Peshawar, received orders 'to raise the Corps of Guides, on 700 rupees a month'. The arming and dressing of this regiment was left to his own judgment, and the men were recruited from the disbanded Sikh regiments—they used to discuss the battle of Sobraon with him in the friendliest manner, so Lumsden records. The object of this new corps, as he explained it later on, 'was to have trustworthy men who

could at a moment's notice act as guides to troops in the field, and collect intelligence beyond as well as within the border'. To do this job the corps included both cavalry and infantry, and enlisted twenty Pathans to act as interpreters. It went into action the moment it was trained, against a village which Lumsden calls 'Babuzai on the Buneyr frontier', the inhabitants of which had refused to pay their taxes. Complete surprise was achieved, and the action was a success; the culprits 'were tied up and secured and marched off with all their cattle to the open plains without a shot being fired. . . .' Though young and full of gaiety, Lumsden already showed the qualities necessary for the job of raising, training, and commanding a regiment. He was strong and tough, and a superb judge of men. His orders, however unpleasant, were always obeyed without question; his command was so sure, in fact, that shouting and blustering were quite unnecessary. He could think and write quickly and lucidly; his *Frontier Thoughts and Frontier Requirements* is a model of military writing. He did not scorn the orthodox, but was never afraid to experiment, and judged every situation as it arose, with a cool common sense backed by exact knowledge. Well before he reached thirty he had become a legend.

In 1848 there came the next explosion in the Punjab, signalled by the murder of two British officers at Multan, a fortress town in the south-west. Strong action was obviously needed, but Lord Gough (as he had now become), who was relaxing among the cool lakes and woods of Simla, had no desire to go campaigning in the hot weather. The new Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, had not yet obtained a grip on the situation, and Henry Lawrence was back home on leave. Two men who did realise the danger were John Lawrence (Henry's younger brother and a rising power in the Punjab) and Herbert Edwardes, who raised a scratch force of 3,000 Pathans on the Frontier and headed south. By the end of November, when Lawrence was ready to sail from Southampton, rebellion had spread right across the Punjab and the

British found themselves with another major campaign on their hands. Unhappily Lord Gough was still in command, despite Dalhousie's efforts to remove him, and in battle after battle thousands of lives were thrown needlessly away. Only when he learned that Sir Charles Napier was on the way to replace him did Gough abandon his lifelong faith in cold steel, and consent to prepare his attacks with artillery.

Meanwhile the situation on the Frontier had grown desperate, and it was only the continued exertions of Herbert Edwardes and the young officers around him which saved the day. John Nicholson, an officer of great stature and tremendous authority, and George Lawrence (the younger brother of Henry and John) began raising a corps of Pathans at Peshawar, and arming the Mohammedan peasants in the Hazara hills. One of their great worries was Attock, the crossing point of the Indus, for they knew that if this was captured by the growing Sikh armies under Chatar Singh, then Peshawar would be isolated, and the Afghans would then come storming through the Khyber. In August, as the situation steadily deteriorated, John Nicholson rose from his bed, though in a raging fever, and headed south for Attock with sixty Pathan horsemen, leaving orders for 150 levies to follow him on foot. Riding hard through the night, he reached the Indus with about half his horsemen, in the early hours of the morning, and dashed up to the gate of the fortress. Rousing the garrison from their sleep, he demanded that the gates be opened for him, and when this was done ordered that the men arrest their mutinous leaders. For some moments the situation looked ugly, and if the Sikhs had set on him Nicholson could not possibly have escaped with his life. But he was of the stuff that great heroes are made (twenty years later mothers in the Punjab would threaten their naughty children that 'Nikal Seyn' would get them) and his language and presence made a shattering impression. The Sikhs were cowed, and did as they were told; Nicholson took over

the fort and prepared it for a siege, then, leaving it under a loyal commander, began scouring the countryside with his cavalry, putting down disorder wherever he found it. But with so few men he could not possibly hold the Indus valley, and repeatedly he wrote to Currie at Lahore, urging him to send up an entire brigade. But nothing was done, Gough refusing to weaken the garrison there. By early September Chatar Singh and his army were on the march and Nicholson, far too weak to attack, hung on his flanks and watched his movements.

Chatar Singh's objective was Peshawar, but even before he reached it the troops there mutinied, and George Lawrence had to hand over his wife and children to Dost Mohammed's brother, Sultan Mohammed Khan, who promised to escort them to Lahore. However, he broke his word and soon they were prisoners in his fort beyond the Indus. Nicholson tried to save them but without success; and then George Lawrence himself was taken prisoner by the Sikhs. By now the whole country from the Indus to the Jhelum was in a state of insurrection, and on the 3rd November Chatar Singh took Peshawar. The Frontier lay wide open; and Dost Mohammed, still seeking revenge against the British for the indignities of the First Afghan War, came down to join the Sikhs who promised the return of the Peshawar valley as a reward. The worst fears of the Lawrences, of Nicholson and Edwardes, had been realised.

However, after several months of campaigning and a heavy defeat at Chillianwala, Gough managed to beat the Sikhs decisively at Gujerat on the 21st February 1849. Thousands of Afghan infantry headed back to the Indus and fought a defensive action around the bridge at Attock. Harry Lumsden was after them, however, with his Corps of Guides, and a few days later he reached Peshawar and took over the city until George Lawrence (the third of these remarkable brothers) could resume his post. The British were back on the Frontier again—and this time they intended to stay.

For a while the future of the Punjab was uncertain: though annexation was being discussed the final word had not been given. Sir Henry Lawrence was against it; the Board of Directors of the East India Company was hivering, and the decision would obviously have to come from Dalhousie. How he arrived at it is still uncertain. According to John Lawrence, who met him for the first time at Ferozepore on the 12th March, the latter asked, 'What is to be done? What is to be done with the Punjab now?' To this question, Lawrence replied: 'Annex it now: annex it now: annex it now!' Lawrence's view was the annexation would be easy while the people were still crushed by defeat, but later on it would be more complicated. Dalhousie made all kinds of difficulties, but finally saw the force of Lawrence's arguments and gave way.

This version of the conversation is vehemently denied by Dalhousie's biographer, who points out that Dalhousie had committed his intentions to writing long before the meeting with Lawrence. On the 23rd October the previous year he had written to Sir John Hobhouse that 'all hope of establishing an independent Hindu or Sikh power in the Punjab must be abandoned'. Hobhouse replied that the Board of Control were against annexation, but on the 7th November gave way and wrote: 'It is clear now that you have the right to do what you choose.' Ignoring for the moment the pressure brought by John Lawrence, one important factor leading to Dalhousie's decision was the danger from Afghanistan on the North-West Frontier. On the 24th March 1849 he wrote to Hobhouse: 'I have never felt, more especially since the Afghans came on the stage, the tremor of a doubt, or seen reason to question for a moment the necessity of the policy [of annexation] which I submitted to you.' The North-West Frontier, in fact, could not be defended merely by a chain of forts and frontier posts; what was needed was a stable administration in depth behind it. And with the Punjab as well as Sind in British hands, this could now be achieved.

On the 30th March the deed was done. In the presence of Sir Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, the faithful remnant of the Sikh Durbar, and the young Maharaja, who took his seat on the throne of Ranjit Singh for the last time, Dalhousie had the proclamation read out. The East India Company would take over the Punjab and all the properties of the Sikh state 'in part payment of the debt due by the State of Lahore to the British Government, and of the expenses of the war'; the Maharaja Dhulip Singh would be treated 'with honour and respect' and be given a pension of some five lakhs of rupees per annum; and the Koh-i-Noor diamond which had been taken from Shah Shuja by Ranjit Singh would be 'surrendered to the Queen of England'.

It is no part of the brief of this work to justify the British action in taking over this or any other province, but it may be worth noting en passant that not everyone in the Punjab was sorry to see the change. The following words were written by the Punjab historian, Syad Mohammed Latif, in 1889:

'What does our history disclose? Corruption, degradation and treachery stalked openly through the land. Confusion and disorder of every kind ran riot over the length and breadth of the empire. The country was desolate, and vice, cruelty, extravagance and profligacy overspread its surface. Strife became chronic, and anarchy reared its head everywhere.... But is it not now one of the most secure, and has it not become one of the most prosperous and flourishing of the countries of the globe under the fostering care of the English? Witness the gigantic railway projects.... Witness the vast public works.... Witness the grand schemes of irrigation.... Witness the blessings of religious toleration and freedom enjoyed by the meanest subject ... a state of things unparalleled in any other country under the sun....'

But, as Latif went on to argue, the Punjab is the most exposed to invasion of all the Indian provinces, and never, except for short periods, had it known security on its North-Western Frontier. This security the British

were determined it should now have. Rightly or wrongly they took over the old Sikh boundary running along the edge of the tribal lands, though from the experience of the previous years they had some idea of the troubles in store for them. There was no serious suggestion that the Peshawar plain should be abandoned, though John Lawrence was said to be in favour of this course. There was no suggestion either of pushing forward; the disasters of the First Afghan War still burned deep in the mind of every soldier and administrator. The policy for the next twenty-seven years, in fact, was known as the 'Policy of Masterly Inactivity'. The name is misleading, however, for between 1849 and 1879 no less than thirty-seven expeditions were launched across the Frontier to keep the tribes in check, and the number of smaller actions is beyond counting. These were stirring days, when many of the great frontier names came to the fore: Colin Campbell and Neville Chamberlain, John Jacob and Robert Sandeman. They were busy days, when the defences of the Frontier were organised from Chitral to Baluchistan. They were days of great anxiety, and included the Indian Mutiny. They were probably the best days the British Empire would ever know.

FIVE

THE YEARS OF MASTERLY INACTIVITY

FOR the sake of convenience, the period may be divided into three phases: 1849 to 1856, 1857, the year of the Indian Mutiny; and 1858 to 1876. Some common threads run through all three phases, some developments overlap the Mutiny on either side, but the division is not entirely artificial. After 1857 British attitudes in India changed very considerably; the army was reorganised, and the Bengal regiments were disbanded. Even if the problems on the Frontier were not transformed the vision of the men dealing with them was. Also, many great figures, such as John Nicholson and Henry Lawrence, were engulfed in the Mutiny and the Frontier never saw them again.

In 1849, when the soldiers and political officers began making their way along the Frontier to see what exactly it was they had taken over, they found the whole area studded with forts erected by the Sikhs. Each one of these was occupied with what one official called 'a robber chief' whose private army collected revenues from the surrounding area. The tribes had been at war with the Sikhs and, as they soon made it clear, had no inclination to give up their predatory habits now the British had appeared. Their poverty and their traditions of a thousand years made a sudden change impossible, in any event. So, as Dalhousie and Napier, the new Commander-in-Chief, realised, there must be enough specially trained troops to maintain a constant watch, and launch punitive expeditions when necessary. In June the Guides were increased to three troops of cavalry and six companies of infantry,

and a new regiment, to be known as the Punjab Frontier Force, was raised. Its first commander was Captain John Coke, who followed Lumsden's example and recruited men from a whole array of fighting tribes, and like Lumsden he was remarkably successful. When Napier came up to Peshawar a year later he was very impressed with this new unit and declared he'd never seen anything superior to its drill. Within a year of being raised the Punjab Frontier Force was in action, and its record on the Frontier for many years was a very remarkable one. To back up these specialised units, a force of five infantry and five cavalry regiments was based at Peshawar, and the first district commander, who arrived in November, was Brigadier-General Sir Colin Campbell, soon to win immortality with his 'thin red line' in the Crimea. His command extended along the 700 miles of the Punjab Frontier only; the Sind Frontier was under the command of that remarkable soldier, John Jacob, to whom we shall return later on.

When Colin Campbell arrived, fighting on the Frontier had already started. In October Harry Lumsden, one of whose jobs' was that of Assistant Commissioner in Yusafzai territory, reported to Lieutenant-Colonel George Lawrence, now Deputy Commissioner at Peshawar, that some of the villages were refusing to pay their revenues, and threatening war. Lawrence sent on this report to the Government, mentioning that the Sikhs had always sent 1,500 men with about four guns to make the Yusafzai collection, and indicating that the British would have to follow suit. The Government agreed, so on the 3rd December the Guides and the Frontier Force went into action, inflicting twenty casualties on the tribesmen and destroying a village. A few days later the chiefs came down to Lumsden, confessed their sins, and promised to pay up.

This was the first armed tax-collecting expedition, and it was to be followed by many others. Such operations, not to mention the punitive expeditions in reprisal for raids and other forms of disorder, were somewhat an in-

novation to the British, and soon questions came to be asked as to their ethical basis. In reply the Punjab Government produced a document which argued that there was a point beyond which forbearance could not be carried, and that, as each expedition was sanctioned by the Government (as opposed to the Army), it was 'always in the nature of a judicial act'. It was the delivery of punishment, and as such must be morally justified. 'As a Government it is our bounden duty ... after exhausting all milder measures, to chastise ... tribes or sections of tribes who openly and habitually rob and murder our subjects, or violate our territory.' But the trouble about violence is that as an instrument it is not very precise; and despite all the care exercised by the troops, there were cases when (so it was alleged) women and children were made to pay for the sins of their menfolk. When Lieutenant-Colonel Bradshaw, who commanded the forces against the Yusafzai villages in the action just described, sent in his report, it so enraged Sir Charles Napier that he wrote: 'It is with surprise and regret that I have seen ... that villages have been destroyed.... I desire to know why a proceeding at variance with humanity and contrary to the usages of civilised warfare, came to be adopted. I disapprove of such cruelties, so unmilitary and so injurious to the discipline and honour of the Army. Should the troops be again called upon to act, you will be pleased to issue orders that war is to be made on men; not upon defenceless *women and children*, by destroying their habitations and leaving them to perish without shelter....'

Napier, it will be remembered, was one of Wellington's officers, and had imbibed this doctrine from his early years of service. He had passed it on to John Jacob, who, during all his years in Sind, managed to combine justice and mercy to a remarkable degree. Bradshaw was so hurt by Napier's reproof that to the end of his career he never allowed another village to be burned.

To some officers, Napier was speaking in ignorance of the realities of Frontier warfare; and certainly, as time

went on, the policy grew tougher. But the Bradshaw incident serves to illustrate another problem which has dogged the Frontier since the early days: the relationship between the military and the political officers. As Bradshaw pointed out, the village had been burned by, or under the orders of, the Political Officer with his column, although he personally, as commander, was held responsible. The feeling between the two services was touched on by Harry Lumsden as early as October 1849; when resigning his Assistant Commissionership to concentrate on his command of the Guides, he remarked that he did not want letters from the Board telling him that 'Mr. So-and-So, who had only been out two years in the Civil Service, would not have made the mistake which you have fallen into'. This friction stemmed from the basic problem of whether the Frontier was to be an area in which the military assisted the civil, or the civil the military; and unfortunately the problem was never stated with sufficient clarity. In Harry Lumsden's day the civil held sway; even the Punjab Frontier Force was raised 'for Police and General Purposes . . . under the orders of the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-West Frontier'. As time went on, however, there was a tendency to regard the Frontier as primarily a military concern; but still lack of definition set up abrasive relations between soldiers and the politicals. Another development resulting from the same lack was the control of the tribes—'the minor problem'—devoured so much time and energy as the years rolled by, that it overshadowed 'the major problem', the establishment of a stable buffer state in Afghanistan, and the defence against invasion from Central Asia.

But, to return to the tribes, it should not be imagined that the British attitude was merely negative; on the contrary, great efforts were made to conciliate and persuade. The hated capitation tax of Sikh days and all frontier duties were abolished; complete freedom of trade was instituted, and commercial intercourse encouraged in every way. The Powindahs, the itinerant merchants, were welcomed when they came down on to the plain to

trade; fairs were held; and later on roads were built from the passes to the nearest bazaars. When hospitals and dispensaries were set up, free medical treatment was provided for the tribesmen and their families. Tribal chiefs and councils were encouraged to come across the border to settle their disputes; waste land was colonised and given to families wishing to come across the border to settle. And finally employment was found for such able-bodied men who wanted it, not only in the army but in the police and government service.

From the above it will be seen that the civil power had a very important role to play on the Frontier; but it still remained true that British policy was one of conciliation backed by force. In the early 1850's many people imagined that the former would succeed to such an extent that the latter would diminish, but they were doomed to disappointment. The tribes, declared Sir Richard Temple (one of John Lawrence's assistants), were incorrigible. They took the free medical treatment, then gave asylum to fugitives from justice: they violated British territory, blackmailed and intrigued; they sent agents across the border to murder British subjects. The result was, as one Frontier historian puts it, 'the contumacious attitude of the tribesmen eventually drove the British to resort to reprisals and resulted in a state of chronic warfare for many years'. The warfare was so hot during some periods that many people were driven to the conclusion that Dalhousie had made a major blunder in occupying the old Sikh frontier; it was too long, too mountainous, too difficult to control, and impossible to defend, they argued. But they argued in vain; the British would stay there as long as they held India, and have to make the best of it.

Now the Powindahs have been mentioned," it may be worth halting the main narrative to introduce them. They are great clans of warrior merchants, Ghilzais and Kharotis as well as Powindahs proper, who for hundreds of years have brought their caravans through the passes from central Afghanistan to the Punjab plain. They paid

taxes to the Kabul Government, and grazing tax to local officials, but otherwise preserved their independence and settled their own quarrels. They kept aloof from Frontier politics, but if the tribes on the passes opposed their passage (which was very frequently) they had no hesitation in fighting their way through. In Lumsden's day and for some years to come the Powindahs would only debouch on to the plain after stern battles had raged in the Gomal, Tochi, or Kurram valleys. Though motivated solely by the profit motive, they were an admirable body of men, and remained a colourful feature of Frontier life. Surrendering their arms at the control point as they crossed the Frontier in the autumn, they would remain under British rule for up to six months of the year. Their black camel-hair tents were protected by savage guard dogs, and the women and children remained behind in them while the menfolk took their camel trains to trade in the Punjab villages. Their wares included felt rugs, carpets, dried fruits, fresh grapes, and lambskins, and as these were sold they would acquire salt, tea, hardware, and textiles to take back to Afghanistan in the spring.

The Powindahs, however, did not form the only group regularly crossing the Frontier. There were also Jajjis, Jadrans, and Mangals, who travelled south to trade, and the Ghilzais who went as far as Bengal to hawk cloth. Apart from these, there were the itinerant workmen who spent the winter in India. Altogether it will be seen that these travellers made up quite a large proportion of the Afghan population, and the closing of the passes could be used as a lever by the British Government to bring pressure on Kabul.

British officers serving in Peshawar (or indeed anywhere beyond the Indus) were always in some personal danger, whether in action or merely in the mess. Though the Pathan population of the city was very different from the tribesmen, it still reacted to troubles in the hills, and its temper was just as uncertain. From the arrival of Colin Campbell a standing order came into force that officers should never move without their arms, and (like

all such orders anywhere else) this order was very unpopular. Officers going to social gatherings, such as polo or cricket matches or picnics, hated being encumbered with sword belts or holsters, and sometimes disobeyed the order. One such subaltern was brought before Sir Colin Campbell who grew very angry, and shaking his fist at him, remarked, 'I'll tell you what it is, young man—you may go without your breeches, but dammit, sir, you shall carry your sword!' Though Peshawar is on the plain, the hills are not very far away to the east, west, and north, and whenever the troops went near them there was always the chance that an occasional bullet would hit the rocks at their feet. The Adam Khel Afridis in the Kohat Pass, some twenty-five miles to the south, were always on watch. On one occasion Lumsden entered the pass on a journey to see Captain Coke of the Frontier Force, who maintained a post near Kohat, and came across a tribesman 'blowing at the match of his matchlock'. When Lumsden asked him what was the matter he merely shrieked, 'Coke! Coke!' Lumsden gave his own name and rode on, but when John Coke came out to meet him, at the far end of the pass, he said: 'He's after you. Nothing but my being able to assure him that I was Lumsden, saved my skin.' Laughing, Coke replied that 'Khok' was the Pushtu word for pig.

By 1850 the Adam Khel Afridis had become such a nuisance that Colin Campbell was forced to lead an expedition against them. The previous year the Government had come to an arrangement with them whereby they would keep open the Kohat Pass in payment of an annual subsidy of Rs. 5,700, but, on the 2nd February 1850, a party of sappers building a road were surprised by a force of a thousand men who killed twelve and wounded six others. Campbell began his advance on the 9th March and entered the pass the following day, the passage of the main column being protected by the 1st Punjab Infantry who picketed the hills. The first objective was the village of Akhor, but before the troops could reach it, a deputation of maliks come out to protest their

innocence. George Lawrence, who was accompanying the column as Deputy Commissioner, replied that the villagers had an hour to surrender themselves and their arms. The maliks went away, but returned later on to inform him that the terms were unacceptable. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Napier, who was with the column also, ordered Colin Campbell to 'crown the heights round the village', and Lawrence, who had some 1,500 levies under him, set off to do this. In due course, after a concentration from the Horse Artillery, the attack went in and, though the Afridis fought gallantly from behind breastworks, the position was carried. As Napier was around however, the village was only partially destroyed. The column then pushed on into the pass, and, fighting minor actions en routé, reached the Kohat kotal, where it camped for the night. Next morning there was an incident which was to be repeated time and time again on the frontier. Owing to the slackness of an Indian officer the pickets coming downhill after relief were left unprotected for a few moments. So, seeing their chance, the Afridis launched an attack and inflicted a number of casualties, before being driven off by the Horse Artillery. When the column marched back through the pass on the 13th, after completing its punitive task, great care was taken with the movement and relief of pickets, and there was no trouble. As expedition followed expedition, and the tribesmen grew more and more expert at 'reading' the movements of troops, the relief of pickets, and the relative positions of advance and rear-guards, and the main bodies of columns, had to be regulated with absolute precision if trouble were to be avoided. The whole business, in fact, became a 'battle drill'.

No one has recorded his detailed impressions of this first operation in the Kohat Pass, but it is difficult not to believe that in essence it was not the same as any other carried out during the next hundred years, so far as the troops were concerned. There was the wilderness of rock and sand, the heat, the blinding glare from the sun, the

stony nullahs, and overlooking all those bare mountains, silent but with a thousand eyes. The attack on the picket was almost exactly the same as an attack described by John Masters, which took place in Waziristan in the mid-1930's: 'One blinding volley—one rush, two seconds of stabbing and hacking, and it was done—six soldiers dead and six left for dead, twelve rifles and six hundred rounds of ammunition gone, one tribesman dead. Another typical Frontier incident.' Typical in 1850; typical in 1935 and (one might add) in all the years between.

The Afridis continued to give trouble, and in 1851 Captain Coke led another expedition against them; in that year there were also two expeditions against the Mohmands, living north-west of Peshawar. In 1852 no less than four expeditions had to be launched, against the Umarzai Waziris, the Black Mountain tribes, the Rani-zais, and the Utman Khels. After these were over, Sir Colin Campbell left the Frontier, as did Harry Lumsden. The year 1853, however, was as troubled as the one which preceded it, for not only were the Shiranis on the Dera Ismail Khan border giving trouble, but the Jowaki Afridis, the Yusufzais, and the Minchi Mohmands. The expeditions against these tribes were routine, and of no special interest, except to the men serving in them, they accomplished their limited aims, but their impact was ephemeral.

But now it is time to look at that remarkable soldier John Jacob, who, with his Irregular Horse, had brought law and order, and peace to Sind. As already indicated, he was a remarkable man, possessing both physical and moral courage to an extraordinary degree. Whatever he thought was right and just he would do it, whether (as sometimes happened) it brought down the wrath of his immediate superior, or the Commander-in-Chief, or the Governor-General. His territory covered an area the size of England and Wales put together, but so great was his authority and so swift his movement that there was no corner of it, not even deep in the wastes or across the blistering sands, which did not quiver at his name. He

had very few officers to help him and virtually no one to consult, for long periods; he was solely dependent on his own moral resources. Fifty years later his name would be mentioned as one of the finest men who ever served in India.

The uniform of the Sind Horse had been designed by himself, and at a glance his men looked like troopers for some old Mogul army. The native officers carried double-barrelled pistols and sabres, but no thrusting weapons, Jacob detested the latter, for, as he remarked, 'if you run a man through on the move, you either break your sword or are unhorsed because you can't get it out.' Tunics and breeches were green and in the winter sheepskin jackets were worn over them. Each man wore long English jack-boots, and carried three days' supplies for both himself and his horse. Under the belly of the horse, and attached to the girths, was slung a leather mussack containing two gallons of water. By making his men both mobile and independent in this manner, Jacob was able to bring off some outstanding achievements. Once when a herd of camels had been stolen, he rode straight into the desert after the thieves and, as his men were expert trackers, caught up with them on the second day. The thieves were somewhat amazed, believing themselves quite safe in the desert.

Jacob was not only responsible for the interior of Sind, but its stretch of the North-West Frontier, and over this the Bugtis kept raiding. Though merciful wherever possible, Jacob was resolute in punishing persistent wrong-doers, and in one action against the Bugtis he killed not less than 600 men and took the remainder prisoner. Not surprisingly, the chiefs, fearing his wrath to come, walked in to surrender. In his report on this action Jacob wrote: 'The loss of life has been terrific, but it is satisfactory to know that the men slain were robbers and murderers, who were the terror of all peaceable persons within their reach, and whose cruelties were sometimes fiendish.' With only one regiment at his disposal, Jacob's life was one of continuous action, and he remarks, 'We had literally to

lie down to rest with our boots and swords on for many months together.'

But even so, and by some miraculous means, Jacob managed to improve the physical conditions on the Frontier. When he first saw it, he says, 'it was a desert wholly destitute of permanent inhabitants, and a great part of the year without water. The annual rainfall did not amount to an inch per annum. The difficulties to be overcome were great. . . .' Five years later, however, in 1854 he could write that 'On the formerly desert border there are now always supplies for an army. . . . Where there was formerly only brackish water for a squadron of Horse, there are now tanks and wells affording an unlimited supply of fresh water. . . . Roads and bridges have been constructed by me all over the country amounting to 600 miles in length. . . . Peace, plenty, and security everywhere prevail in a district where formerly all was terror and disorder.'

Without in any way diminishing the achievement of John Jacob—as a lone achievement it was astonishing—it is only proper to point out that some things were in his favour. The tribes of Baluchistan, on his sector of the North-West Frontier, were not Pathans, but a mixture, some tribes being descended from Arab invaders of the ninth century, some being of Persian stock, and others showing traces of older peoples such as the Dravidians. They were less fanatical and aggressive than the Pathans; and they had great respect for their own chiefs. Once the chiefs were won over by the British, the tribes followed as a matter of course. The other factor was geographical; the Baluchistan tribes did not extend very deep into the plains of southern Afghanistan, and behind them were sparsely populated and arid lands which afforded no 'bolt-hole'.

One of the most difficult problems Jacob had to deal with, however, was Kalat, west of Jacobabad and south of Quetta, a wild mountainous area ruled over by a khan who nominally recognised the suzerainty of Kabul. In 1841 Colonel Outram and Colonel Stacy, the Resident at

Quetta, negotiated a treaty with the Khan whereby his foreign relations would be controlled by the British, who in turn would guarantee him his dominions and help him to preserve internal order. By 1851 the treaty was a dead-letter, as the British had failed to give the help agreed, and the Khan was now at the mercy of his sirdars. To make matters worse, the northern tribes, notably the Marris, had cut loose and were raiding British territory. Jacob, with the agreement of Bartle Frere, who had now become Commissioner for Upper Sind, proposed that a subsidy of £5,000 should be paid to the Khan, in consideration of his sending a force to deal with the raiders. The Khan, however, was so weak and so at the mercy of his scheming Vizier, that he was unable to do this, and so in 1853 Jacob asked Frere if he could take his Irregular Horse into Kalat and deal with the recalcitrant tribes. 'I would bring down on the Murrees,' he wrote, 'every tribe of hill and plain around them and crush them far more effectively than any regular force could do.' But Frere havered and consulted his superiors, and six months later Dalhousie put his oar in. 'I cannot believe in subsidising the Khan ... to sustain his power,' he wrote, and 'With regard to the Murrees, I can't see the reason for attacking them because they have attacked other people, or the justice of attacking them when they have not attacked us.' The recipient of this letter, Colonel Outram, suggested that the subsidy should be paid for one year as a trial, but as to the trouble from the Marris, he added, 'I shall confidently rely on the entire success of our military operations if left to Major Jacob's sole responsibility. That officer's prudence and foresight are as remarkable as his gallantry and enterprise.' Dalhousie did not take this good advice, and Jacob, falling into despair, as the situation deteriorated on the Frontier, even seriously considered throwing up his career and emigrating to Australia.

Unfortunately, this professional crisis coincided with a private disappointment—the news that a valued subaltern had just become engaged. 'It came like a thunder-

bolt,' he wrote. 'It was a crushing blow ... it involves such a complete overthrow of so many cherished ideas that I seem to be in a dream.' Though the homosexual overtones of this outburst are clear enough, Jacob tried to rationalise his feelings later on, to propound the view that a man may be a soldier or a husband but not both. 'For a soldier who wishes to be active, to work and rise honestly and fairly by his own exertion ... marriage appears to me to be moral suicide: it paralyses him at every turn, deprives him of half his strength, when his power is most required. ... Often I have felt the crushing effect of [one of our General's] marriage on him. He was frequently shorn of half his force by it.' Though held sincerely, these views no doubt stemmed from Jacob's inability to mix in society and his fear of women, brought on by a pronounced stammer. It was about this time that he wrote: 'I do not mind mentioning to you that *it is impossible for language to express*, or for anyone to imagine who has not felt it, the crushing effect which my defective speech has on me. No amount of bodily deformity could equal or approach this curse. Were the bond unloosed, I sometimes feel I could force my way to anything: as it is, I frequently wish I could hide myself in the earth.'

The parallel between John Jacob and T. E. Lawrence must already be plain, and it is a most remarkable one. Both had a tremendous understanding of native troops, both excelled in guerilla warfare, both were completely at home in deserts and wild arid places, both could accomplish astonishing journeys and go without food or sleep for long periods, and both were sensitive and intellectual. Lawrence suffered from his insignificant physique, and Jacob from his stammer, and in both men this abnormality may have led to homosexuality. It is extraordinary how often this inversion appears among people, of any race, who achieve a mastery of the desert; both the Arabs and the Pathans have a high proportion of homosexuals. In dwelling for a moment on this trait of Jacob's character, however, there is no suggestion of criticism. He

was without doubt a most remarkable soldier whose achievements on the Frontier have almost been forgotten while those of lesser men have been remembered.

In 1854 Jacob got his way. Riding across the mountains with a squadron of his horsemen, he held a long meeting with the Khan and negotiated a treaty which was a model of lucidity. 'No oppression or violence shall be allowed,' ran the next, 'whether very great or small. Justice shall be administered to all men.' The Khan agreed to accept the subsidy, and in return to stamp out raids across the Frontier, drawing on any help from Jacob that should be needed. Later on, Jacob was to report that 'the Khan and his officers are doing all that men can do to carry out our wishes'. Belatedly Lord Dalhousie recognised the worth of Jacob's achievement, generously admitted his misjudgment, and showered congratulations. 'Thank God,' Outram wrote, 'Lord Dalhousie has had time to judge and learn your true value, and in him you have a real friend.' As it turned out, this atmosphere of mutual regard lasted barely a year, and was abruptly terminated when Jacob set out his views regarding the organisation and training of the Bengal Army, in a letter to the *Bombay Times*. These views ran contrary to the orthodox ideas of the time, and Jacob received a letter of severe censure. Three years later, however, his main criticisms, and especially his stricture that 'a native soldier in Bengal is far more afraid of an offence against caste than of an offence against the Articles of War', were amply justified with the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny.

Before leaving Jacob and his achievements it may be well worth noting his foresight in another matter. By 1854 he had become convinced that the most likely route to be used by any invader would run through Herat, Kandahar, and the Bolan Pass, rather than the Khyber. He therefore advocated that Quetta, lying at the north-western end of the pass, in Baluchistan, should be occupied with a considerable force. A military road should then be built, running back through the Bolan, to connect with the roads in Sind. To base the defences of the

whole North-West Frontier on Peshawar, hundreds of miles from the Bolan Pass, and cut off by the lack of lateral communications, he considered to be the height of folly. But his suggestion fell on deaf ears, and even Lord Canning, when he succeeded Dalhousie in 1856, saw formidable drawbacks. The garrison at Quetta (he pointed out) would be isolated 200 miles from their supply point, and with the pass behind them. The tribes along the pass though not politically hostile, were 'plunderers by profession', and the line of communications would therefore come under attack. 'Military occupation long continued in such a country,' Canning argued logically, 'must vary with it, civil government, and civil government is sovereignty. The red line on the map would again be pushed further westward, and without finding so good a resting-place as now.' Despite all the difficulties, however, Jacob's main contention still held; and the day would come when it must be put into effect.

By then Jacob had long been dead. In 1855 he was appointed to the Commissionership of Sind with the rank of major-general, and though he travelled less, he worked even harder. 'The business I strive to get through daily would be sufficient to overwhelm fifty brains instead of one,' he wrote in March 1858. 'I seldom get above three hours sleep in the twenty-four, and the work will kill me which I do not regret: for I have proved and established principles and built foundations on which others will be able to work. . . .' A few days later he died in the presence of Colonel Green, who now commanded the Sind Frontier, and many old troopers of the Sind Horse. When the news reached England there was a spontaneous outburst of praise in the Press, all the more remarkable in view of the abuse it had heaped on him from time to time, while he was alive. *The Times* said: 'The Indian Army has lost a general, and the Indian service a hero. . . .' The *Telegraph* declared: 'Another noble Englishman lies dead in India—the victim of neglect, if not of absolute persecution. Never did a finer soldier step than this gallant sentinel of our Indian frontier.' The *Spectator* went even

further, naming him 'a chevalier sans peur et sans reproche, whose death was an irreparable loss to the Empire'.

Jacob himself considered that in many ways his career had been a failure, but his achievement in Sind and the fact that his name remained a legend on the Frontier proves otherwise. To this day he remains one of its greatest characters.

On the 7th December 1856 Dost Mohammed left Kabul on a journey to Peshawar, the Pathan city he had so long coveted, to discuss a new treaty with Sir John Lawrence. Lawrence, who was now in charge of the Punjab administration, encamped with his staff and 300 troops on the plain between Peshawar and Jamrud, the old fort at the mouth of the Khyber, and waited for news of the Amir's approach. It was not till the 1st January 1857 that a message came; this informed him that the Amir was in the pass and requested that Lawrence, together with Herbert Edwardes (now Commissioner for Peshawar), and two of Dost Mohammed's sons, who had now ridden forward, should go into the pass and meet the Amir there. Though he had no option but to comply, Lawrence was not happy. As his biographer puts it: 'It was indeed an instinct of self-preservation, no less than the stringent orders of the Government which had prohibited Englishmen, however adventurous, from entering the precincts of those dreaded Khyburees. . . . John Lawrence, knowing well the risk he ran, had begged Sydney Cotton to give orders to his troops that, if any firing was heard within the pass, they should at once enter it and rush to the rescue.' In a few hours, however, the party arrived, to be greeted by a salute of guns, which was echoed by a discharge of matchlocks all over the hills. Two days later Dost Mohammed rode out of the pass on to British territory, and the treaty which had been mooted for over a year was signed.

The credit for this meeting and the subsequent treaty should go to Herbert Edwardes, who had first put up the suggestion in 1855. His motives are not quite clear,

though he probably realised that there was a definite link between the Frontier tribes and Kabul, and reasoned that the better the understanding with the first, the less trouble there would be with the second. John Lawrence turned down the suggestion flat, but fortunately Dalhousie supported Edwardes, and in March 1855 it was arranged that the Amir's son, Ghulam Haidar, should come down to Peshawar and sign a treaty. This was very short and did little more than reopen diplomatic relations and reaffirm that the British had no hostile intentions towards Afghanistan. The latter for its part pledged that the Amir would continue 'the friend of the friends and enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company'. It is doubtful if this treaty was regarded with undue solemnity by either party, but by a curious trick of fate the good faith of one signator was soon to be tested. In October the following year the Persians seized Herat, and the British, declaring this much disputed border province to be 'an important element in the defence of British India against the possible machinations of Russia', promptly declared war on Persia. This was the last thing the Shah wanted to happen; and giving his armies orders to withdraw, he instructed his diplomats to open negotiations for a treaty. It was quickly drafted and quickly signed, and Persia promised never to interfere with the independence of Afghanistan again. In these circumstances it is not surprising that when Edwardes suggested to Dost Mohammed that the treaty of 1855 should be enlarged he accepted without hesitation. The new treaty, signed on the 26th January 1857, stipulated that the Amir was to receive a subsidy of £10,000 a month during the war with Persia (the formalities of the peace would not be concluded for another two months), and for this would maintain sufficient troops to defend his country. He would also permit a party of British officers to go to Kandahar to ensure that the money was spent in the agreed manner. Lawrence and Edwardes, quite naturally, wanted a mission in Kabul also, but Dost Mohammed's advisers, remembering what had happened

the last time the British were in that city, argued strongly against the proposal, which eventually was dropped.

The articles of agreement were signed at 4 p.m. on the 26th January in the Amir's tent, and one can only wish that a photographer had been on hand, so many men were present who were to play important roles in the story of the Frontier. Apart from Dost Mohammed's party, which included his son Azim Kham, and his brother, there were, on the British side, John Lawrence, Herbert Edwardes, Harry Lumsden, Brigadier-General Sydney Cotton, and Brigadier-General Sir Neville Chamberlain, Colin Campbell's successor and one of the great Frontier soldiers. When Dost Mohammed had signed the document he lay down his pen and said so that all could hear, 'I have now made an alliance with the British Government, and come what may, I will keep it till death.' Four months later, with the outbreak of the Mutiny, these words were recalled with great relief, for, as Harry Lumsden put it, 'had it not been that the minds of the Afghans were in a measure prepared for the Amir's non-interference, he could not have prevented a general rush down the passès, which must have added greatly to our embarrassment at Peshawar and along the frontier'. But even with the treaty and Dost Mohammed's promise, things were still desperate.

The Mutiny, which would be more accurately described as the Sepoy's Revolt, began on the 10th May. Some sepoys at Meerut refused to accept the new cartridges (which rumour said were greased with pig fat) and were promptly put in irons. On Sunday morning other sepoys released them, while the Europeans were at matins, shot their officers, and made for Delhi. There were no British troops stationed here, so the sepoys seized the city, with the enthusiastic support of the garrison, and elected the eighty-two-year-old Emperor Bahadur Shah as their leader. The causes for the Mutiny were many and complicated, and they have often been described in detail. There is, therefore, no need to repeat them again here; but to understand the situation as it applied to the

Frontier, a word is necessary on the general organisation of the Army. In 1857 the total military strength wielded by the East India Company was 238,000 men, of which 38,000 were Europeans. Each presidency had its own army, and the largest, the Bengal Army, numbered 151,000, of which 23,000 were Europeans. Unlike the Bombay and Madras armies, the Bengal Army recruited a large number of high-caste men, Brahmins and Rajputs, who were always (as John Jacob had pointed out) more difficult to control. It was the Bengal Army which mutinied, and the other presidencies experienced very little trouble. However, in northern India, once news spread that the sepoys had seized Delhi, the flame of insurrection spread rapidly, the garrisons at Nasirabad, Nimach, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and Benares rising and shooting their officers, and massacring European women and children. By mid-June British authority had ceased to exist from the borders of Rajputana to Patna in Behar.

News of the Mutiny had reached the Frontier on the 11th May, when a signal from Delhi came into John Nicholson's office in Peshawar: 'The sepoys have come in from Meerut and are burning everything. Mr. Todd is dead and we hear several Europeans. We must shut up.' Nicholson was standing in for Edwardes, who happened to be away from Peshawar that day, but when he came hurrying back it was to find that Nicholson had rapidly worked out a plan to save the Punjab and break the back of the Mutiny. This was that a Movable Column should at once be formed with the object of travelling rapidly from one area to another, as the danger showed itself. At the same time it would also prevent the mutineers from uniting their forces into a large army. Nicholson's next suggestion was that a strong irregular force of Multani Horse should be raised in the southern Punjab to be led by himself.

There was no need for Nicholson and Edwardes to remind each other of the key position they were again holding at Peshawar: they both realised with startling clarity that unless the Frontier were kept under control, then

the whole of the Punjab would rise, and following it the rest of India. The Afghans would then come pouring down through the passes and the British would be wiped out. There were about 2,000 British troops in Peshawar and these could deal with any insurrection among the sepoys, but should the 50,000 Pathans in the city rise also, then the situation would be desperate. To make sure that no such thing happened, therefore, action had to be swift and decisive; and it was fortunate that both Edwardes and Nicholson were in their thirties, and men of rapid decision. Sydney Cotton was sixty-five—not an unusual age for a brigadier-general in those days—but he was still very active, and Neville Chamberlain, commanding the Punjab Frontier Force, was only thirty-seven.

But, apart from deciding broad lines of action, there were immediate practical steps to be taken. Edwardes rode to Cotton's house to confer with him on the question of the Indian regiments. Should they be trusted, or should their arms be taken from them? Meanwhile Nicholson strode round the British officers' messes, gave the news of the Mutiny, and warned that it must be kept from the sepoys as long as possible. Having done this, Nicholson joined Edwardes, and they galloped to the post office, where all correspondence was seized. Awaiting for delivery, they found, were a number of newspapers containing cryptical, but nevertheless unmistakable, messages for the sepoys, and it soon became obvious that every Indian regiment in Peshawar was implicated. The following day, the 12th May, General Reed, the Divisional Commander, arrived, and summoned a meeting at his house for the next morning. Nicholson, Edwardes, Cotton, and Chamberlain were all there, and a subaltern called Frederick Roberts, of the Horse Artillery, later to become the famous 'Bobs' and Commander-in-Chief, India. Though the situation was grave, Roberts recorded that Edwardes and Nicholson remained calm and took a wide view of the situation. They had just received a telegram from the Chief Commissioner for the Punjab, John

Lawrence, approving the general course of action suggested by them. But the first consideration was obviously the Frontier. Nicholson and Edwardes stated that in their view all friendly tribal leaders must be trusted, and efforts made to persuade their men to side with the British. Also, Irregular levies should be recruited along the Frontier, as they had been in 1848. General Reed and the other soldiers agreed enthusiastically, and the idea of the Movable Column was then discussed. The trouble was that everyone wanted to command it, and so the decision had to be referred to John Lawrence, who was now at Rawalpindi. Within a few hours the reply came: Chamberlain was to command the column, which was to be formed at Jhelum. For his staff officer, Chamberlain chose Roberts, and so this young officer was given his first chance to distinguish himself.

Meanwhile, however, Roberts had to compose his record of the meeting and the decisions arrived at, and sent off a number of signals. But before he had completed this task Nicholson came to him in a towering rage and accused him of leaking information concerning the meeting. Roberts hotly denied the charge, and so Nicholson suggested that they should both go along to the telegraph office, to see if the leak could have occurred there. The signaller proved to be little more than a boy, and under Nicholson's powerful interrogation he soon broke down and confessed. A friend had asked him how the British intended to deal with the situation, he said, and so he had told him. This admission cleared Roberts; but it meant that the news was now over the whole city, and had undoubtedly reached the sepoys. Attention now centred on the 64th Native Infantry (already implicated by the newspaper messages) and Nicholson advised Cotton that the men should be marched out of their cantonments and sent to garrison forts along the Frontier. This was done, the pretext being that an attack was expected from the tribes, and the mutiny was nipped in the bud.

Soon after the meeting at Reed's house, Edwardes was called for consultation by John Lawrence, and Nicholson

remained in charge at Peshawar. For a few days it looked as if his prompt action had saved the Frontier, and on the 16th he was able to write his mother that all was quiet. Three days later, however, the situation changed as some Indian cavalry stationed at forts along the Frontier became restive. A native newspaper had published a story that sepoys had mutinied in the hills, and then a fakir was caught with a message on him which asked sepoys from the outposts 'to come in with a few officers' heads and join in a rising on the 26th May'. When the newspaper editor had been imprisoned and the fakir hanged, Nicholson approached the tribal chiefs to recruit men for the levies, but they had heard the news from Delhi and were 'sitting on the fence'. One of the chiefs told Nicholson brutally that the sahibs had better look to their own salvation. The warning was quite clear: if the Punjab went, the whole Frontier would become a sheet of flame.

The Commander-in-Chief, General Anson, realised that the focus of his counter-offensive must be Delhi, and, at his headquarters at Ambala, began organising a force to march against it. This force was not to have much luck: Anson died from cholera soon after it got under way, and his successor, General Barnard, died of the same fever not long afterwards. When the force reached Delhi it was too weak to attack, and was for some time more besieged than besieging. The situation could only be restored when the British troops arrived from Bombay and Madras, and they would take some time.

Meanwhile throughout the Punjab and along the Frontier things steadily deteriorated. When Edwardes arrived back at Peshawar on the 21st May he at once joined Nicholson in his attempt to raise levies from the Frontier villages, but even their joint effort was completely unsuccessful. The horizon was now so dark and the sense of impending danger so strong that they dared not even take off their clothes to sleep, and lay down armed where they were. No native regiment could be relied on, and it was little surprise when at midnight a telegram arrived to say that the sepoys at Nowshera, only

thirty miles to the east of Peshawar, had mutinied. Calling for their horses, Edwardes and Nicholson galloped in the darkness to Cotton's headquarters, and put the situation to him: as soon as the sepoys in Peshawar heard the news they would mutiny also, and the only course, therefore, was to disarm them at first light. It will be realised that both Edwardes and Nicholson (though soldiers by profession) were both employed as Political Officers, and therefore could not order Cotton to take the necessary action—they could only urge. Many commanders would have promptly told them to mind their own business, but Cotton was a man of great intelligence, and recognised the stature of the officers he was dealing with. Without hesitation he sent off messages to the commanding officers of the native regiments and summoned them to his room. Here, to their horror, he told them of his decision, and a painful scene followed. According to Edwardes: 'The commandants of those regiments ... unanimously and violently declared their implicit confidence in their men. One advised conciliation and another threatened us that his men would resist and take the guns.' Quite naturally the colonels felt that the disgrace to their regiments must reflect on themselves, and, unlike Cotton, they resented the intervention by the 'politicals'. Nicholson, who had anticipated this reaction, handed the colonels a packet of letters, remarking, 'Perhaps these will interest you.' The colonels examined the letters, which gave ample proof of their men's complicity in the mutiny, but their minds were closed to reason, and they went on repeating their assurances like parrots. In the end, when he realised that argument and vituperation would lead nowhere, Edwardes cut in decisively, remarking, 'The matter, gentlemen, rests entirely with Brigadier-General Cotton.' For a moment there was silence as the officers turned towards the old soldier. Fortunately he didn't hesitate; just said quietly but firmly: 'Gentlemen, the troops will be disarmed. Those are my orders, and I must have them obeyed.'

By now it was six o'clock and within an hour the regi-

ments were paraded in their cantonments. At either end of these were posted two British regiments with artillery support, close enough to intervene but not close enough for provocation. When the sepoys were formed up in line Edwardes and Cotton rode past them from one flank, while Nicholson approached from the other, escorted by some wild-looking tribesmen from the Multani Horse. The command 'Pile arms!' was given, and for a few moments the strain was considerable, as the British officers waited to see if it would be obeyed. Fortunately, however, the sepoys had been caught completely by surprise, and after a moment's hesitation they began to carry out the familiar drill. Edwardes wrote later: 'It was a painful and affecting thing to see them putting their own firelocks into the artillery wagons—weapons they had used honourably for years.... The officers of a cavalry regiment, a very fine set of fellows, threw in their own swords with those of their men, and even tore off their spurs. It was impossible not to feel for and with them.'

The disarming of the regiments had an immediate effect. As Edwardes and Nicholson rode back from the cantonments, the tribal chiefs who had treated them with disdain a few days earlier now came up and offered their services; and soon levies poured in from the villages. The town of Peshawar, which had been on the brink of insurrection, so Edwardes was soon reporting, had suddenly become 'as quiet as a Bayswater tea-garden'.

With Peshawar safe, the next task was to stamp out the insurrection at Nowshera. Unfortunately news was soon received that the mutineers there had marched off to join the main body of their regiment which was stationed at the fort at Mardan: also that the commander at Mardan, Colonel Henry Spottiswoode, was so horrified that his troops should have mutinied that he had blown his brains out. At dawn on the 24th May the column left Peshawar under Colonel Chute, who was accompanied by John Nicholson as Political Officer. The reaction of the sepoys, once they saw the dust from the column rising across the plain, was to seize all the money and ammuni-

tion they could carry and head for the hills of Swat. This hurried retreat so disappointed Chute, who, like his men, was hot and thirsty after a long march, that he decided to give up the chase and make camp. But Nicholson was made of sterner stuff, and, collecting a squadron of Multani Horse and some mounted police, he galloped in pursuit of the sepoys. Now this extraordinary soldier was in his element, and (to quote his biographer) 'the man of action, who had so long been cramped by official duties, could at last express his personality with absolute abandon. . . . At the head of his small force, mounted on a big grey charger, he fell upon the main body of sepoys, who turned to receive him, broke under the shock and scattered in every direction. He hunted them out of the villages, grappled with them in ravines, chased them over hills.' Hour after hour beneath the blistering sun the hunt went on, and Nicholson did not give up till he had fought and galloped for over seventy miles, and 150 dead sepoys had been counted. Later that night he returned to Mardan with 120 prisoners and the regimental colours.

Inevitably the prisoners were condemned to death, but Nicholson put in a plea for the Sikhs' and young recruits. 'Blow away all the rest by all means,' he wrote Edwardes, 'but spare boys scarcely out of their childhood, and men who were loyal and respectful up to the moment when they allowed themselves to be carried away in a panic by the mass.' Edwardes referred the matter to John Lawrence, who was against blowing 120 men from the guns. 'On further reflection . . . ' he wrote, 'I do not think that we should be justified in the eyes of the Almighty in doing so.' As a compromise, he suggested 'destroying from a quarter to a third of them'. Cotton, who perhaps did not have the views of the Almighty so firmly in mind, chose forty men—an exact third—and these were condemned to suffer the terrible death of mutineers.

The sentence was carried out on the 10th June on the parade ground at Peshawar, the whole garrison was formed up on three sides, the fourth side being occupied by the guns. All around were thousands of Pathans who

had come not only from the city itself but the surrounding countryside, and there was a low murmur as the culprits were marched on to the parade ground and bound forcibly to the mouths of the guns. When the last man had been secured, the gunner officer reported to Cotton, and was asked to carry on. There was a roar and a flash and then a pall of smoke. When it had cleared the mangled remains of the sepoys were cut away, and the horrified troops marched back to their barracks.

Nicholson was not present at this occasion; after delivering the prisoners he had rejoined Colonel Chute's column which was now marching from fort to fort along the Frontier. Each of them was garrisoned by a detachment of the 64th Native Infantry, and evidence soon came in that these sepoys were trying to suborn the Frontier police and men from the Punjab Frontier Force. Early in June Nicholson obtained permission to disarm all the detachments from the 64th, and on the 10th he rejoined Edwardes at Peshawar. Here the news was that, apart from the Frontier, things were still going badly. More and more mutinous regiments were marching into Delhi to swell its garrison, and the British force sent to lay siege to the town could not stop them. Faced with this situation, and the urgent appeals from the generals, John Lawrence was sending all the troops from the Punjab that could possibly be spared. To replace them Edwardes and Nicholson set to and trained thousands of tribesmen, working against the clock from morning to night. There were Afridis, Mahsuds, Waziris, Ghilzais, and cut-throats and wild men of no known designation. Probably never in all history has anyone tried to make an army out of such riff-raff; and it is doubtful if the job could have been done at all if Nicholson hadn't been in command. But the fact which kept beating in his brain was that the Frontier had to be held, and these were the only men available to hold it. Already, as he knew, messages had been sent from the mutineers to Dost Mohammed, pleading with him to strike, now the British had their backs to the wall. So far, Dost Mohammed had temporised; had

kept his word to the British; but whether he would continue to do so, no one could tell. Nicholson, with his detestation and mistrust of the Afghans, was not so optimistic.

Then on the 10th June a bolt arrived from John Lawrence. It was in the form of a long letter addressed to Edwardes and ran as follows:

'I have done all I could to urge vigorous and prompt action at Delhi, and only stopped when I perceived that I might do more harm than good. . . . If Delhi does not fall at once, or if any disaster occur there, all the Regular army, and probably all the Irregular Cavalry will fall away. . . . I think we must look ahead and consider what should be done, in the event of a disaster in Delhi. My decided opinion is that, in that case, we must concentrate. All our safety depends on this. If we attempt to hold the whole country we shall be cut up in detail. The important points in the Punjab are Peshawar, Multan, and Lahore. . . . But I do not think we can hold Peshawar and the other places also, in the event of disaster. We could easily retire from Peshawar early in the day. But, at the eleventh hour, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible.'

Lawrence went on to make the astonishing suggestion that Dost Mohammed should be invited to come and take over the city, arguing that 'Peshawar would accomplish his heart's desire, and would do more to make the Afghans friendly to us than anything else. . . .' Edwardes' initial reaction was that his great chief, the 'Titan of the Punjab', had gone out of his mind, but the letter was too logically phrased and argued to admit this. The only possible reason, therefore, must be that the situation in general and the continuing bad news from Delhi had over-taxed his strength, and induced a mood of profound pessimism. Hurriedly Edwardes called in Nicholson and Cotton, and, as he expected, they both agreed with him: Peshawar must be held; the North-West Frontier must not be abandoned. On the 11th Edwardes wrote to Lawrence:

'My dear John, We are unanimously of opinion that

with God's help we can and will hold Peshawar, let the worst come to the worst, and that it would be a fatal policy to abandon it and retire across the Indus. It is the anchor of the Punjab, and if you take it up the whole ship will drift to sea.... As for a friendly transfer of Peshawar to the Afghans, Dost Mohammed would not be a mortal Afghan—he would be an angel—if he did not assume our day to be gone in India, and follow after us as an enemy. Europeans cannot retreat—Kabul would come again.'

But John Lawrence saw the situation as a case of alternatives: either the British must relinquish Peshawar or they must abandon the siege of Delhi. There was no other solution. This view he communicated to the Governor-General, Lord Canning, and repeated it in letter after letter to Herbert Edwardes. 'Peshawar is not India,' he argued, 'though it is natural that you should write now as if it were.' He did not agree that Dost Mohammed would follow the British across the Indus. 'Even if he had the will, he would not have the power. The difference between the trans-Indus Mohammedan and his co-religionist on this side is the difference between a demon and a human being....'

For some weeks, while the argument went on, the fate of Peshawar hung in the balance. As Lawrence kept reminding Edwardes, the siege of Delhi was still going badly, and General Reed, who was now in command there, was still screaming for more troops from the Punjab. Edwardes, convinced that any pusillanimity where Reed was concerned would only bring on disaster, wrote angrily to Lawrence on the 26th June: 'You must not go on throwing away your resources in detail by meeting General Reed's demands for reinforcements. If he cannot take Delhi with eight thousand men, he will not take it with nine thousand or ten thousand. Make a stand! Anchor, Hardy, anchor!' It was not until the 7th August that the matter was finally resolved. On that day Lord Canning took the initiative and signalled Lawrence: 'Hold on to Peshawar to the last.' Though the rebels in

Delhi still held out, India was saved.

By the time this signal was received, Edwardes was on his own, Nicholson having left to command the 'Punjab Movable Column', in place of Chamberlain, who was wanted as Adjutant-General to the army before Delhi. However, he still remained calm and confident, and his chief worry was the rumour circulating that Sir Henry Lawrence had been killed during the siege of Lucknow. Unfortunately the rumour proved to be true. 'He was our master, friend, example, all in one . . .' Edwardes wrote, 'a father to us in the great earnest public life to which he led us forth . . . our feeling was ever that the old Cavaliers, who looked for the day when "the King shall enjoy his own again".' To Edwardes, Nicholson, and indeed to everyone who had worked for him, Henry Lawrence was incomparably the greatest man they had ever known. Beside him John, for all his success and many achievements, was a mere pygmy. They had never forgiven John for ousting his elder brother from the Punjab; neither did Henry until he lay dying. Then he was heard to murmur, 'I forgive everyone—I forgive my brother John.'

The campaign to reduce Delhi is another story which cannot be told here, but perhaps it is worth mentioning that it was a man from the Frontier, the now legendary John Nicholson, who became the hero of the hour. Anson and Barnard had died in the field, and Reed broke down after six weeks. Nicholson, who had proved such a success with the Punjab Movable Column, was called in, and (to borrow Edwardes' phrase) 'soon raised the mercury'. A bumbling general called Wilson was nominally in command, but Nicholson gingered him along, and then took charge of the final assault. It went in on the 12th September against an impossibly hot fire from the walls. Nicholson was badly wounded, but his example had communicated itself to the men, and after days of fierce fighting they triumphed. On the 20th September, when he heard the news, he murmured, 'My desire was that Delhi should be taken before I die and it has been granted.' Soon afterwards he passed away.

With the fall of Delhi, the back of the Indian Mutiny was broken. In November Sir Colin Campbell, who had now become Commander-in-Chief, finally relieved Lucknow, then pressed back the remnants of the rebel force into the Terai bordering Nepal. Pockets of resistance still held out, though, especially at Jhansi and Gwalior, and it was not until the 8th July 1858 that Lord Canning was able to announce that India was at peace again. But things are never the same after any major conflict, and the sub-continent was now to enter a new phase. The Mutiny had shown that rule by the East India Company could not possibly continue; and on the 1st November a proclamation was published under Queen Victoria's signature stating that the Crown had taken over. As a result of this great constitutional change, Indians would now be trained for government service, and the native Army would be completely reorganised.

It should be mentioned that though the new Indian Army became the direct responsibility of the Crown, units of the British Army continued to serve in India. As time went on it became customary to brigade together Indian, British, and Gurkha battalions, and Royal Artillery batteries served alongside their counterparts in Indian Army formations. This arrangement worked well both in war and peace, and survived triumphantly the major conflicts of the twentieth century.

The North-West Frontier was still quiet, but with John Lawrence still in office its future lay undecided. In 1858 and again in 1859 he reiterated his view that Peshawar should be handed over to Dost Mohammed. In July 1859 he even sent Palmerston a document entitled 'Arguments for Transferring Peshawar and Kohat Districts to Dost Mohammed'. In this he stated: 'We cannot hold this Tract [i.e. the trans-Indus Frontier strip] without maintaining a large body of British troops in the Peshawar Valley. Its climate, however, is so insalubrious in the summer and autumn months that the annual mortality among these soldiers is very large.... In the crisis of 1857, out of some 2,500 British soldiers, those fit

for duty seldom exceeded 1,100.' Apart from keeping the army healthy, there were other advantages, Lawrence considered, in drawing back. 'In our present position we are brought in close contact with the Afghans and other races of a highly fanatic and restless nature; men of predatory habits, careless and impatient of all control.' But once we are safely on the south bank of the Indus, contact with the tribes would be broken and the treasury would save the £500,000 spent annually on border affrays. Even more important, the Amir would be better disposed towards the British, which in turn meant that the North-West Frontier would be more securely protected. Anticipating the inevitable criticisms, Lawrence concluded: 'Those who oppose this policy consider it a confession of weakness. . . . To this it may be replied that our position in India is weak and our true policy is to recognise that weakness; and set about remedying its defects.' Across the back of this document Palmerston wrote: 'An instance of the follies of the wise', then scrawled a single word which looks like 'Absurd'. The 'back to the Indus' policy made no headway either with soldiers or statesmen, and there was never any serious chance that it would be implemented. Lawrence's other policy, of 'masterly inactivity', was continued, however, by Lord Canning and then by Lawrence himself, when he returned as Viceroy in 1864. From time to time, soldiers and Frontier administrators would suggest a change, and Lumsden in a report submitted in September 1867 argued that in view of the complete inability to 'bring our direct influence to bear . . . in support or otherwise of the de facto Government ruling in Kabul', the Government of India should annex the Kurram and Khost valleys. To this Lawrence replied curtly that such a policy would court misfortune and calamity. 'The Afghan will bear poverty, insecurity of life; but he will not tolerate foreign rule. . . . Whether we advanced into Afghanistan as friends or foes, would, in the end, make little difference; the final result would be the same. The Afghans do not want us; they dread our appearance in their country.' If anyone doubted this

opinion, Lawrence added, they should study the history of the First Afghan War.

When the question of Quetta came up again in 1866, Lawrence still stuck to his guns. It will be remembered that the suggestion that this town at the entrance to the Bolan Pass should be occupied was first put forward by General John Jacob in 1856, and rejected by Lord Canning. The man who revived it was Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Henry Green, the Political Superintendent of Upper Sind, who was anxious about the Russian advances across Central Asia. A force at Quetta, he argued, would be on the flank of any Russian advance through Afghanistan towards the Khyber; it would also block the Bolan Pass. Green was supported by Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor of Bombay, but the Commander-in-Chief, Sir W. R. Mansfield, was against the plan and Lawrence would not even consider it. If a clash came with Russia, he argued, 'The winning side will be the one that refrains from entangling itself in the barren mountains which now separate the two Empires.' Sir Henry Durand, the veteran of the First Afghan War, argued that the first requirement for any improvement in the defences of the North-West Frontier was the completion of the railway system in the Indus valley, which would enable troops not only to be brought to the Frontier but moved laterally to any danger point. But at the same time he warned that Quetta might have to be taken over in the future.

It was at this time, however, that, so far as the local tribal problem of the Frontier was concerned, the first breach in Lawrence's policy was made. The Sind sector of the Frontier was administered by a different method from the Punjab sector, and in the Dera Ghazi Khan district, where they met, certain anomalies occurred. The Marris and Bugtis, for example, who overlapped both sectors, received allowances from the Punjab but not from Sind. Also they owned land on both sides of the Punjab administrative boundary, but in Sind this was not permitted. In the Punjab tribal customs were recognised, but in Sind—following the firm tradition laid

down by Napier—they were not. Men committing murder in a blood-feud or killing their wives for unfaithfulness were still being hanged. In 1866 Captain Robert Sandeman (later to become famous for his pacification of Baluchistan) was posted to Dera Ghazi Khan, the district adjoining Sind, and found the villages beset by raiders. He therefore took a small party of Baluch guides and walked across the boundary and into the hills, where he entered into direct negotiations with the tribal chiefs. In a remarkably short time the whole district was pacified, and the effectiveness of Sandeman's action was recognised all along the Frontier. The 'Closed Border System'—the name given to Lawrence's policy by the Frontier administrators—gradually decayed; and in its place there arrived what came to be called the 'Forward Policy'. And this was to generate more heat, more controversy, more bitterness, than any other Indian policy in the nineteenth century.

Though there were many expeditions on the Frontier during this period, against the Khudu Kels, the Waziris, the Mahsuds, the Utmanzais, and the Black Mountain tribes, the only major action occurred in 1863. This was the Ambela campaign, under Brigadier-General Sir Neville Chamberlain, which turned out to be a very desperate affair indeed; it cost the British and Indian regiments nearly a thousand casualties, half the losses sustained between 1849 and 1890, in forty-two expeditions.

The trouble had started around Ambela many years previously when a Mohammedan fanatic called Sayyid Ahmad returned from Mecca with a hundred followers and began preaching in the Yusafzai villages along the northern Peshawar border. By 1829 he had enlisted so many devotees, bent on jehad, or holy war, that he was able to capture the city of Peshawar from the Sikhs. Two years later a strong army was dispatched from Lahore which threw him out, and in the pursuit towards the hills Sayyid was cut down together with a thousand of his

men. The survivors found their way eventually to Sitana, a village at the foot of one of the spurs of the great Mahabun mountains, which stand on the west bank of the Indus, some forty miles north of Attock, and seventy-five north-west of Peshawar. It was a wild, inaccessible area with narrow passes, and peaks running up to nearly 15,000 feet, which had almost broken the hearts of the police trying to control it. 'It would take the whole of the Hazara force one day to search one mountain,' wrote a despairing Commissioner, 'and at the end they would be quite knocked up and useless.' The village of Sitana belonged to Sayyid Akbar Shah, a lieutenant of the slain prophet, and he welcomed the fugitives from Peshawar, and allowed them to settle on his land. So there was formed another fanatical colony, the members of which came down to loot and plunder and raid the trade caravans, holding their merchants to ransom. In 1852 things became so serious that Colonel Mackeson crossed the Indus from Hazara with a force composed of irregulars and levies and expelled the fanatics from Fort Kotla, near Sitana. However, he failed to burn their headquarters (no doubt aware that Sir Charles Napier's eye was upon him), so it was not long before the Sitana fanatics were back again, and the raids continued just as before. During the Mutiny they kept open house for any sepoys coming their way, and by 1858 their stock of arms and ammunition was so great that they were able to come down from the hills in force. The result was that Sir Sydney Cotton marched against them with 5,000 men, and, in a brisk campaign, burnt their villages, blew up their forts, and chased them right out of Sitana. The fanatics then retired to Malka, on a northern spur of the Mahabun, and here they set about repairing their fortunes. By 1860 they had managed to organise a widespread conspiracy against the British, with headquarters at Patna in Bihar, and an efficient mail service. They even went to the trouble of inventing an elaborate code in which, for example, a battle was called a 'lawsuit', remittances were called 'rosaries', and God was known as

'the law agent'. Recruits were marched for hundreds of miles across north-west India, and along the routes chains of hospices were established. The organisation was of a very high order, and standards of security were such that the Indian Government had no idea that a widespread conspiracy existed. In 1861 the fanatics came down the mountainside and fortified a peak just above their old haunt, at Siri. The reaction of the British was to blockade the tribes which had allowed them free passage, and so by July 1863 the fanatics were back again at Sitana, and raiding on a bigger scale than ever. In September they even mounted an attack on the Guides camp at Topi, and the Government was stung into action. But, as was immediately realised, it was no use merely driving them from Sitana as Cotton had done; the village must be attacked from the north, so that there would be no bolt-hole into the hills. The fanatics must either be slaughtered or driven across the Indus so that the troops in Hazara could deal with them.

Neville Chamberlain had no desire to lead the expedition. At forty-three he was prematurely aged, tired, racked by malaria, and suffering from many wounds, and he wanted to go home, or at least to find a pleasant station where he could relax. Also, he was feeling rather disgruntled, and when news of the proposed expedition reached him, he wrote his brother, Crawford, 'It looks as if my last days in the frontier are to be spent in fatigue and exposure. If "duty" *really* requires the sacrifice I cannot repine, but after the neglect shown to my recommendation in the last expedition, I have no wish for active service....' Though dogged by a reputation for being somewhat hot-headed, Chamberlain was one of the most interesting of the Victorian generals, and certainly one of the most efficient. He had seen a vast amount of service, and, in fact, one can barely open a book about the building of the British Empire in India without his name popping up. He served in the First Afghan War (where he was wounded four times), the Sikh Wars, the Mutiny, and numberless actions on the Frontier. Curi-

ously, for a soldier, he was a keen yachtsman and undertook a number of long voyages. He was also a gargantuan letter writer, and his eyewitness accounts of battles are probably the finest of his time. Even between fighting and being wounded time and again in Afghanistan, he was able to send home long detailed letters of over a thousand words each. In his youth he had been immensely high-spirited, but time and suffering had saddened and exhausted him. 'I want to turn my sword into a shepherd's crook,' he said in 1863, but it was not to be. Lord Elgin, who had now succeeded Canning as Viceroy, insisted that he should deal personally with the Malko situation and, with an admirable sense of duty, he stopped arguing and went.

His base of operations, so he soon decided, should be the Chamla valley, which lay in territory where the tribes were thought to be friendly. But to reach this valley the expedition would have to cross a belt of mountains which extended from the Gooroo mountain to the southwestern spurs of the Mahabun. To accomplish this feat, three passes were available, the Daran, the Ambela, and the Kanpoor, but knowledge of the latter was entirely lacking at the time. The Daran had been explored by Sir Henry Cotton, who recorded that it was impassable by artillery, and inhabited by very unfriendly tribes. The only hope, therefore, was the Ambela Pass, and it was thought that the fanatics' stronghold at Malka could be reached via this in a forced march of two days. The snag was, however, that the Ambela was claimed by the Bunerwals, a warlike tribe who lived on the other side of the Gooroo mountains. If they were to intervene, then the expedition would have a very difficult task on its hands indeed. Fortunately, so Chamberlain was advised, the Bunerwals had no sympathy with the fanatics, and no trouble was therefore expected from them. On this premise he decided to advance with two columns. The Hazara column, which would protect the Indus line and overawe the tribes in that area, and the Peshawar column, under Chamberlain himself, which would move

up to Nawakili, about six miles from the Daran Pass. The object of the latter move was to trick the fanatics into believing that the column intended to enter the hills by the route Cotton had used five years earlier, but instead, it would suddenly change direction and head for the Ambela Pass sixteen miles away. Once safely through, it could reach Malka on the third day.

But things went wrong from the start. Once the fanatics got wind that an expedition was on the way, they guessed its destination and route immediately, and sent holy men to make overtures to the Bunerwals. If the latter permitted the British a free passage through the Ambela Pass, the holy men argued, their territory would be seized, then permanently annexed by the British, as was the custom of those infidels. Not surprisingly, the Bunerwals succumbed to this argument and agreed to fight. Meanwhile, the expedition itself had run into supply problems, and when Chamberlain arrived at his base camp on the 19th October—the politicals had asked him not to join until the last moment 'in order not to alarm the frontier tribes'—he found chaos reigning. 'Some of our guns and 5½-inch mortars have to be sent back as useless.... Our 1st L.F. Batteries have to be stripped to make the Half Battery R.A. efficient. But go we must, delay would be very prejudicial... to the object we have in view.' In fact, the column got under way at 9 a.m., the Guides Cavalry in the lead, followed by the 11th Bengal Cavalry, the Guide Infantry, the 5th Punjab Infantry, and then the 20th (Punjab) Native Infantry. Soon a junction was effected with the troops sent to guard the Daran Pass, and the advance column halted at the entrance of the Ambela Pass. Three hours behind it came the main body, the 71st Highland Light Infantry, the 101st Royal Bengal Fusiliers, and three regiments of Punjab Infantry, supported by a Half Battery of guns. 'The hills on either side,' wrote Chamberlain, 'grew higher and closer together, and masses of rock had to be worked round or scrambled over.' There was no road. However, by 2 p.m. Colonel Wilde and the advance

guard gained possession of the head of the pass, where they camped on some open ground, and a few hours later Chamberlain came up with the main body. His original intention had been that the force should now descend three miles into the Chamla valley and camp near the village of Ambela, but soon word came that the guns could not arrive before dark. He therefore camped on the crest of the pass, overlooked by the Gooroo mountain. Even though he had the cares of the campaign on his mind, Chamberlain still found time to record his observations in detail, noting that 'The sides of the Gooroo mountain were clothed with fir-trees of large growth, interspersed on the lower slopes with the wild fig and date-tree—a remarkable mixture of the vegetation of a cold and a tropical climate.... A range of hills much lower than the Gooroo was on the right.... To the rear, but far below, was seen the plain of Yusafzai.'

The next morning Colonel Taylor, R.E., and Lieutenant Robert Sandeman (who was soon to transfer to the Political Service, as already recorded) rode forward with a cavalry escort, provided by Lieutenant-Colonel Dighton Probyn, V.C., to carry out a reconnaissance. They met with no opposition, but as Taylor passed the Kotal or saddle-back leading to Buner, he noticed that the tribesmen had occupied it in force. Then, as he returned to camp, he found that the tribesmen were also taking up positions in some broken ground covering the mouth of the pass. Probyn led a charge and the positions were captured, to be occupied later on by two companies of infantry. This action so infuriated the tribesmen that they put in a night attack, and according to Colonel John Adye there was a wild shout of 'Allah! Allah!' then—'The matchlocks flash and crack from the shadows of the trees; there is a glitter of whirling sword-blades, and a mob of dusky figures rush across the open space and charge almost up to the bayonets. Then comes a flash and a roar, the grape and canister dash up the stones and gravel, and patter among the leaves at close range. The whole line lights up with fitful flashes of sharp file-fire,

and, as the smoke clears off, the assailants are nowhere to be seen; feeble groans from the front and cries for water in some Pathan patois, alone tells us that the fire has been effectual. . . . High up on a little knoll we see the tall form of the General . . . looking intently into the darkness before him. . . .'

If the attack had failed, it had left Chamberlain in no doubt as to the temper of the tribes, and next morning he set about strengthening his position. On the left, towards the Gooroo mountain, a fortified post called 'Eagles Nest' was prepared, while to the right on the lower hills a string of posts were sited, the chief being called 'Crag Picket'. Wisely Chamberlain allocated a commander to each flank, Colonel Luther Vaughan taking Eagles Nest and Colonel Wilde, Crag Picket. To support the infantry, guns from the Peshawar Mountain Battery were dragged up the rocky slopes, and by the afternoon of the 25th were ready for action. It came at dawn next morning, large numbers of the enemy rushing down the steep slopes to attack, sword in hand. Despite a concentration from the guns, the forward pickets were overrun and three companies had to be thrown into a counter-attack. Later on the Bunerwals attacked the Eagles Nest position, and were only beaten off after forty casualties had been sustained.

On the 27th October the Bunerwals were invited to come and remove their dead, and did so. Some of the chiefs took the opportunity to have a talk with Chamberlain, and admitted freely that their casualties had been heavy. However, they made it clear that their resolution to oppose the British advance had not been shaken; they would attack again at the first opportunity.

As Chamberlain was to observe in the days which followed, the forces of the enemy were increasing steadily, and eventually they contained all the tribes between the Indus and Kabul rivers—some 15,000 men. The situation was becoming grave, but, typically, Chamberlain put on a bold front and signalled on the 27th:

'All goes well, and I entertain no fear as to the final

result it supported by more infantry and kept in supplies and ammunition. Tribes losing men and will try first ... I recommend your sending trans-Indus as many troops as can be spared from below. Any backwardness now might cause great inconvenience. ...'

But the basic fact was that Chamberlain and his force were trapped in the mountains, and the tribes held the initiative. On the night of the 29th October a group of Malka fanatics infiltrated into the brushwood before Crag Picket, then launched a ferocious attack, about half an hour before daylight. Within minutes the men of the 1st Punjab had been killed or pushed off the position, and it was only a determined flanking movement, laid on quickly by Major Keyes, which restored the position. But the job was not done easily; the fanatics got their backs to the rock face and fought on till every man had been killed or badly wounded. Some idea of the ferocity of this encounter can be gauged from the fact that Keyes was wounded, and fifty-four of his men became casualties; two subalterns called Pitcher and Fosbery were awarded the Victoria Cross.

By the 31st October the situation had deteriorated even further and Chamberlain signalled:

'I now have to report that the Akhund of Swat ... has joined the Buners, and that he has brought with him upwards of 100 standards, each representing probably from 20 to 30 footmen ... he has summoned the people of the remote country of Bajour, the Mullazyes of Dher, and other distant tribes. ...'

All these, so Chamberlain added, had agreed to forget their difference and fight under the Akhund as a single army. He continued:

'It is necessary that I should place the state of affairs thus distinctly before His Excellency, in order that he may understand how entirely the situation has altered since the force entered the Ambela Pass.... I feel sure that his Excellency will approve of my not making an advance into the Chamla Valley with my present force, in the face of the above coalition.'

and Cotton . . . the exertions of Neville Chamberlain and Lord Roberts, of Bindon Blood and of Lockhart, Auchinleck, and Alexander . . . the forgotten troops who sweated through 200 campaigns and punitive expeditions, not to mention the thousands of minor and bloody forays . . . the 300 Gordons who fell on the Dargai Heights . . . the administrators who gave their entire life's work, Sandeman, Bruce, Warburton, Roos-Keppel, Caroe . . . the lonely figure of John Jacob traversing the vast wastes of Sind. Viewed as a whole, this must be an effort unique in the history of the world; and the fact that the Frontier still holds, that the Durand Line still remains the keystone of South-Eastern stability, must surely justify it.

But what of the future? At this moment Russian influence in Afghanistan appears to be stronger than it ever was under the Tsars; engineers and technicians are reaching Kabul in increasing numbers; and recent travellers have suggested that Russia is nearer than ever to gaining political and economic access to the Indian Ocean. This may be so. A new and explosive era may lie just over the horizon. But on the whole it is wiser not to anticipate events; or simply to repeat the warning Lord Curzon gave in 1904: 'No man who has read a page of Indian history will ever prophesy about the Frontier.'